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THESIS

**TOWARD A THEORY OF HYBRID WARFARE: THE
RUSSIAN CONDUCT OF WAR DURING PEACE**

by

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December 2015

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WAR DURING PEACE**

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ABSTRACT

With the Russian annexation of Crimea and the undeclared conflict in eastern Ukraine, Western policy analysts have asked if Russia's actions represent a new, more covert approach to warfare. Understanding Russia's perspective on international relations is imperative to supporting potential targets of future Russian action, and specifically, to updating NATO's defensive protocols that are predicated on response to clear military violations of sovereignty. This study uses an existing model for the weaponization of all instruments of state power to examine three case studies that exemplify hybrid political and military forms of war: the 2008 Russian War with Georgia, the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, and the 2014–2015 war in eastern Ukraine. This analysis reveals that the concept of hybrid warfare is often too narrowly focused on a conflict's "kinetic" aspects. In practice, hybrid warfare begins by establishing strategic objectives and employing means that violate another state's sovereignty during a time of peace. Findings further point to successful outcomes when coercive violence is timed to minimize the chances of international military response. Hybrid warfare also holds promise for other malign actors who wish to pursue objectives without directly confronting Western military strength.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

4GW	4th Generation Warfare
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DDOS	Distributed Denial of Service
DIME-FIL	Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economics, Finance, Intelligence and Legal/ Law Enforcement.
DPR	Donetsk People's Republic
FSB	Federal Security Service (Russian Acronym)
FSR	Former Soviet Republic
GRU	Foreign Intelligence Service (Russian Acronym)
IW	Irregular Warfare
KGB	Committee for State Security (Russian Acronym)
LPR	Luhansk People's Republic
MD	Military District
NATO	National Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RF	Russian Federation
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UW	Unconventional Warfare

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The term “hybrid warfare” is used by policy analysts, military leaders, international organizations, and news outlets to cover a wide range of non-traditional actions that apparently lack a unifying context. Dismissing hybrid warfare as meaningless jargon is pointless, however, because it has already gained a level of common usage, particularly with regard to observations of Russian foreign policy. What hybrid warfare lacks is a general theory that will serve to frame its use in a meaningful manner, and that helps distinguish it from the host of other types of “warfare.” More importantly, a good theory can facilitate an understanding of hybrid warfare’s impact on conventional deterrence, defensive alliances, and meaningful counteractions. The purpose of this research was to establish the utility of the concept of hybrid warfare and set a framework toward a general theory.

This research began with a review of the existing definitions and positions on the idea of hybrid warfare and discovered that there was a gap between the current thinking and the foundational understanding of strategy, warfare, and state power. The most common definitions of hybrid warfare focus too narrowly on the blending of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal organizations and tactics - sometimes including a supporting information campaign and cyber warfare. Hybrid warfare has also been attributed to all manner of state and non-state actors, blurring the obvious differences between a powerful actor who employs select methods as a matter of choice and a weaker entity whose means of aggression are limited. Based on these observations, the following hypothesis was formulated: In a condition of total war, a state would employ every instrument of its national power toward achieving its strategic end but the determinative instrument would be the state’s military. In a condition of limited war, the commitment of national power would usually be limited to the strategic objective and only the force necessary to achieve the objective would be employed. Both of these pursuits entail a degree of risk to the aggressor’s military. If a state were to attempt to reach the same strategic objectives through all elements of power while preserving its military strength, the objectives of war would be pursued during a time of peace and

through a hybrid mixture of political warfare and limited violence. An existing model of potential forms of political and military warfare could then serve as a wider aperture through which to test hybrid warfare.

The methods used for this research involved a summary study of the nature of strategic theory and interstate power. With contemporary Russia selected to limit independent variables, Russian political and military theory was examined in its contemporary and Soviet-era forms for indications of a disposition favorable to hybrid warfare. An investigative analysis of three cases—the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the 2014 Annexation of Crimea, and the 2014–2015 War in Eastern Ukraine was then conducted utilizing the Callard and Faber Model of the potential forms of war.¹

The results of this research indicate that hybrid warfare is a way of synchronizing the range of possible *means* toward achieving a desired *end*, while minimizing the risks associated with direct military confrontation. Putin's Russia is an increasingly authoritarian, offensive-realist state; it has a high-degree of centralized control over all domains of national power, unity of strategic vision, and a seeming disposition to violate other nations' sovereignty during times of peace. Russia has three strategic themes that shape its objectives: strengthen Putin's hold on Russian power; affirm Russian dominance in the post-Soviet space; and the reestablishment of Russia as global power. In Georgia, Russia created and then froze ethnic rebel conflicts as a point of leverage in Georgian politics. In both Georgia and Ukraine, Moscow engaged in political subversion, armed proxy groups, manipulated economic conditions and used different levels of violence toward achieving strategic objectives for years before the brief introduction of more traditional forms of military warfare. In Georgia and Crimea, Russia masked the dynamic change of the status quo behind other world events and kept the level of violence below a threshold that might induce foreign intervention. In Donbas, Russia lacked a clear strategic objective and attempted to capitalize on the Crimean success while world attention was focused on Ukraine, resulting in a costly war that escalated and risked Western intervention. In all three cases, hybrid warfare continued after the

¹ James Callard and Peter Faber, "An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/ Spring, 2002): 63.

reduction of overt warfare as Moscow worked to prevent the opposition governments from establishing stable democratic environments and reestablishing sovereign control of their territories.

The implications for policy are that defensive alliances and expectations for deterrence against military threats are inadequate when they are limited to defending against a narrow range of military action. Putin knows he cannot defeat the West militarily and for all of his nuclear saber rattling, he is pragmatic and calculating in his calculations about building a strong Russian state, meaning he will back down before he crosses a line that risks the destruction of his government. Policy should therefore be crafted to reduce strategic vulnerabilities in non-military domains and limit Russian options to the military domain. Putin is a realist who believes that only Russia can guarantee Russia's security. The international community, agreements and diplomatic assurances are tools that he will employ toward Russian interests and discard at their first inconvenience. Putin will likely target any Western influence in Russia and will retain the initiative for future action by fomenting and freezing conflict in the near-abroad to coerce his neighbors and as leverage against Western "interference." Finally, Putin believes in the relative nature of power. He will not only continue to build his military strength and demonstrate it to the world, but he will seek to exploit the rifts in what he perceives are his principle geo-political rivals – the United States, the European Union and NATO. Hybrid warfare is a vehicle for working toward all of these themes while retaining the ability to exploit the systems of the globalized, interconnected, and open West to construct an alternate reality where disturber of the peace can be perceived as a defender of virtue, and appeasement-minded leaders are offered excuses for inaction.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Callard, James and Peter Faber. "An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/ Spring, 2002): 61–68. http://issuu.com/gjia/docs/3.1_-_refugees?e=1.

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I dedicate this thesis to the teammates I have served with over the years whose feats of valor have rarely been properly recognized and whose best qualities were knowable only in the worst of circumstances. *De Oppresso Liber!*

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I. THE STATUS OF HYBRID WARFARE

On March 18th 2014, the stability of the international order was rocked when Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the formal admission of Crimea and the Federal City of Sevastopol into the Russian Federation, completing a nearly bloodless occupation of the peninsula in less than a month. While the seizure of such a large piece of strategic territory from a sovereign nation certainly sent shockwaves through the European continent—whose post-Westphalian sense of stability is bound by a shared belief in the permanence of geo-political boundaries—the cries of outrage were not accompanied by significant calls to action. In the past, such a brazen act could have signaled the opening move of a continental war. However, Russia’s annexation of Crimea was the culminating event in a cleverly executed series of actions aimed at undermining Ukraine’s national sovereignty. This operation’s individual components—political subversion, economic coercion, information warfare, irregular warfare, and ultimately conventional force—were not particularly unique or novel. Taken together, however, the employment of these components in a synergistic, hybridization of political and military warfare, singularly focused on a strategic outcome, resulted in a decisive victory that surpassed Moscow’s expectations for success.² As this manufactured “crisis” was unfolding, Western policymakers, strategists, and media were still struggling to frame a coherent description of what they were seeing, let alone offer an appropriate counter-action.

Russia employed elements from across its complete spectrum of national power as the means to acquire strategically important territory; a comprehensive term defining this type of action, however, remains elusive in the West. With such little violence (only two Ukrainian soldiers were killed) some international observers have even failed to

² Michael Birnbaum, “Putin was Surprised at how easily Russia Took Control of Crimea,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/putin-was-surprised-at-how-easily-russia-took-control-of-crimea/2015/03/15/94b7c82e-c9c1-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3_story.html?tid=HP_more?tid=HP_more. Putin has the benefit of hindsight to extol his own brilliance. With an uncontested success, he was free to claim that he orchestrated every aspect of the Crimean operation. It is worth commenting that he was surprised at how easy it was, which may have affected his calculus about how hard a similar operation would be in eastern Ukraine. An estimation that was arguably not quite right, despite Russian successes.

accurately identify the Crimean annexation as a war.³ Others have explained the operation as “irregular warfare,” in which irregular troops were used to support a conventional occupation.⁴ Despite the presence of irregular forces, the occupation was carried out by regular Russian troops, leading others to conclude that the operation was a traditional military operation, unique only in the persistent denial of involvement by Moscow and the lack of violence that ensued.

Despite the frequent use of the term, there is no theory of hybrid warfare and the uncertain parameters of the term have frustrated efforts to frame actions like the Russian annexation of Crimea. The narrow focus on the military aspects of the Crimean operation tends to gloss over the manipulation of Crimean political processes to promote pseudo-legitimacy, stifle opposition, and slow Ukrainian military countermeasures. A purely military focus also tends to miss the systematic years-long process of subverting the Ukrainian political system through voter manipulation, economic coercion, and the fostering of financial dependency in the years leading up to the 2014 takeover. To dismiss these actions as anything other than deliberate acts of war that enabled the occupation would be like using only the knock-out punch in a late-round boxing match to describe how the dominant fighter won the bout, without looking at all of the body blows that were landed in the earlier rounds or questioning why the winner intentionally selected the timing for the end of the fight. A more holistic assessment of Russia’s actions will lead to a theoretical construct that will facilitate the discussion of counteractions and set the foundation for a generalizable theory that will apply to other actors.

³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 75. Clausewitz also provided a simple differentiation between total and limited war. War takes one of two forms: either it is meant to destroy an enemy’s ability to resist, or it is meant to seize a piece of territory along the enemy’s frontier with the intention of keeping it or of using it as a means of leverage in future negotiation.

⁴ DoDD 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), 14. Irregular warfare is a “characterization used to describe a deviation from the traditional form of warfare where actors may use non-traditional methods such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, subversion, criminal activities, and insurgency for control of relevant populations.” This definition includes many of the components that have been associated with hybrid warfare – the “hybridity” being the mixed use of regular military and irregular actors. This thesis proposes a broader definition of hybridity that focuses on the mixture of political and military forms of war.

A. THE NATURE OF WARFARE AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

War therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.

—Carl von Clausewitz⁵

As force and the threat of violence was used to impose Russia's will on Ukraine, resulting in the complete capitulation of all Ukrainian forces in Crimea, Ukraine's ejection from the peninsula, and the imposition of Russian political control over the space, Russia's actions fit Clausewitz' simplest definition and typology of warfare, despite the limited level of bloodshed.⁶ Russia did not, however, proceed along an expected linear progression of setting the military objective of acquiring new territory, escalating tensions, massing its relatively capable mechanized brigades on the border, bombing military objectives in preparation for a ground attack, and conventionally marching its formations across the desired territory. Nor did it turn its naval guns on the Ukrainian symbols of power, which it could have done without lifting anchor. Russia's military invasion constitutes an act of war, but its very nature has been questioned because it did not follow Clausewitz' proposal for the maximum use of force.⁷ The low level of violence was not, however, due to any Russian aversion to shedding blood. It was instead part of a deliberate calculation meant to create the perceived legitimacy of the action and to preserve Russia's military means of power by preventing a direct clash of military force with the West.

In the post-September 11th era, it has become fashionable to ascribe the world's woes to non-state actors and invisible networks of transnational terrorists. While these entities certainly do pose a threat to Western interests and the world order, the level of that threat is diminished somewhat when a nuclear-armed state begins carving off

⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

⁶ Thomas G. Mahnken, "Strategic Theory," in *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, eds. John Baylis, James J. Wirtz and Colin S. Gray (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67–81.

⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75. Clausewitz proposed the maximum use of force to bring a conflict to a swift, definitive solution. Hybrid warfare pursues the objectives of war through a slow process of attrition and "frozen" conflict that are contrary to this idea.

portions of sovereign neighbors in a region as presumptively “stable” as Europe. The paradigm of asymmetrical warfare methodologies attributed to weak entities wishing to attack the strong has been flipped on its head by a relatively strong power using hybrid, cross-domain approaches to achieve strategic outcomes against a weaker neighbor without relying primarily on the application of overwhelming conventional force. Russia has certainly provided a remarkable contemporary example of this methodology, but the Russians did not suddenly grasp the potential of hybrid warfare absent a costly learning curve, nor did they discover that the conditions for the successful implementation of their innovative approach were less than universal before paying another butcher’s bill. It should be assumed, however, that they are learning and adapting these methods and that they are not alone. If hybrid warfare is to become increasingly common among actors who are in general discord with the West and who wish to avoid the overwhelming dominance of conventional Western military power, then the modeling and study of these approaches is an imperative as they may have important implications for expectations of deterrence, estimations of power, and the significance of defensive alliances.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What is the fundamental nature of hybrid warfare? What are the characteristics of an actor that facilitate the conduct of hybrid warfare? What conditions must exist or need to be created in order for an aggressor to conduct hybrid warfare? Does an existing model of military and political forms of war adequately describe the means of conducting hybrid warfare?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

After years of simmering debate in academic and military circles, the term “hybrid” as an approach to warfare was thrust to the fore in 2010 when U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates published the *Quadrennial Defense Review* and used the term to describe the sophisticated means that both state and non-state actors would employ to mitigate a conventional disadvantage with the United States.⁸ Secretary Gates’

⁸ Robert M. Gates, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Dept. of Defense, 2010).

comments under the heading “Shifting Operational Landscape” hypothesized general descriptions of a hybrid threat that could involve “protracted forms of warfare, use of proxy forces for coercion and intimidation, terrorism and criminality to manipulate the information environment, target energy resources, attack economic vulnerabilities and exploit diplomatic leverage.”⁹ This description covers a range of means that might be employed by an aggressor as well as potential methodologies and targets, but it does little to characterize the nature of the actor or to connect the potential targets to a coherent strategic intent. Without this framework, hybrid warfare is indistinguishable from its more visible irregular, asymmetric, or unconventional components.

Since September 11th, 2001 there has been no shortage of terms that have come into vogue as means of describing the type of war(s) in which the U.S. and its allies have become participants. Some of these terms come from a long lineage of military thought and are rooted firmly in the doctrine of the Armed Forces, yet even those definitions may not reflect the intended meaning when the terms are used loosely in policy circles. Others are the creative inventions of modern thinkers, toiling to put a form and function to observations of behavior that seem to fall outside of established paradigms. Some have overlapping definitions, while others merely sound similar. These terms are legion: asymmetric warfare, irregular conflict, compound warfare, combination warfare, distraction warfare, fourth-generation warfare, low-intensity conflict, limited war, unrestricted warfare, special warfare, unconventional warfare and a host of dimensions where the term “warfare” and the role of force is far from obvious: cyber-warfare, economic warfare, political warfare, cultural warfare, and the like. It is part of the human condition that leads us to try to contextualize things that are new or that we don’t understand, so it is worth noting how many of those words in the first group have a negative construction. “We use ‘not’ words to describe things that we deeply believe should not be: non-state actors, failed states, irregular/ unconventional/ unrestricted/

⁹ Gates, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*.

asymmetrical conflict.”¹⁰ Thus, the conventional advocates of “regular” war have couched those categories as aberrations to a more pure form of traditional warfare.

The sudden (re)emergence of the notion of hybrid warfare led to a scramble to update existing definitions, reconsider its utility in the context of 2010, and even to discount its usefulness altogether.¹¹ Among this latter group, strategists like Colin Gray believe we should “forget qualifying adjectives: irregular war; guerrilla war; nuclear war; naval strategy; counterinsurgent strategy. The many modes of warfare and tools of strategy are of no significance for the nature of war and strategy. A general theory of war and strategy, such as that offered by Clausewitz and in different ways also by Sun Tzu and Thucydides, is a theory with universal applicability.”¹² It is in this same publication, however, that Gray asserts the United States military is too conventional to adapt to irregular threats, threats that are difficult to explain without some of those “qualifying adjectives.”¹³ A problem arises when the adjective itself is the source of confusion. “Hybrid” warfare implies a combination of at least two things to produce a unique offspring. The ambiguity lies in what is being combined.

From those who find some utility in the concept of hybrid warfare, there are two general schools of thought. The first group believes that hybrid warfare is a useful concept, but that it is anything but new. They contend that hybrid warfare is simply the combination of regular and irregular forces on the battlefield; “irregulars” being defined

¹⁰ Montgomery McFate and Andrea V. Jackson, “The Object Beyond War: Counterinsurgency and the Four Tools of Political Competition,” in *Unrestricted Warfare Symposium: Proceedings on Strategy, Analysis, and Technology, 14–15 March 2006*, ed. Ronald R. Luman (Laurel, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Applied Physics Laboratory, 2006), 143–178.

¹¹ Davi M. D’Agostino, *Hybrid Warfare: GAO Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). In response to a request from Congress to define Hybrid Warfare, the Government Accountability Office surveyed the services and came away with various answers. Several services had definitions within service doctrine, but there is no Joint definition, nor was there a plan to write one. The consensus was that whatever “Hybrid Warfare” is, it is covered within the defined spectrum of conflict and there is no reason to add a new definition; “The War of New Words: Why Military History Trumps Buzzwords.” *Armed Forces Journal* (2009).

¹² Colin S. Gray, *Recognizing and Understanding Revolutionary Change in Warfare: The Sovereignty of Context* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 4. Gray’s affirmation of the enduring understanding of the nature of war and strategy are an important part in the framing of this research, which seeks to connect hybrid warfare to these established foundations.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

as militia, guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists.¹⁴ The U.S. Army TRADOC G-2 expands this list slightly to include “two or more of the following: military forces, nation-state paramilitary forces (such as internal security forces, police, or border guards), insurgent organizations (movements that primarily rely on subversion and violence to change the status quo), guerrilla units (irregular indigenous forces operating in occupied territory), and criminal organizations (such as gangs, drug cartels, or hackers)” with a heavy emphasis on the use of cyber operations.¹⁵ This view of hybrid warfare, as limited to combinations of conventional and irregular forces, perceives only the combinations of the military forms of war along with criminal elements and cyber-warfare. It is interesting to the historical study of battles and campaigns but it is of little use in explaining the combination of military and non-military instruments of power in achieving objectives that were once the exclusive role of military force.¹⁶ It also fails to grasp the nature of an actor and the circumstances of less-than-overt hostilities that would have to exist for the effective sponsorship of criminal networks or cyber-attacks.

The second school of thought has numerous definitions for what constitutes hybrid warfare. Most of these definitions also include conventional and irregular forces, but give special categorization to the operational reach of terrorism, and then include a wide variety of innovative approaches to applying technology and resourcefulness to negate an opponent’s military superiority; a weaker-attacking-stronger dynamic that is generally associated with asymmetric warfare.¹⁷ Others define ‘hybrid’ as the mixture of battlefields in the information warfare domain through the simultaneous efforts to win influence over the “populations in the conflict zone, on the home front, and in the

¹⁴ Peter R. Mansoor, “Hybrid Warfare in History,” in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, eds. Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–17.

¹⁵ TRADOC G-2, “Operational Environments to 2028: The Strategic Environment for Unified Land Operations” (August, 2012), 5.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*. Clausewitz describes the exclusivity of military force to the conduct of warfare due to the inability of any other implement of power during his time to either attrite enemy forces, or seize and hold desired territory.

¹⁷ Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson, “Hybrid Warfare,” *JSOU Report* 13–4 (August, 2013); Nathan P. Freier, *Strategic Competition and Resistance in the 21st Century: Irregular, Catastrophic, Traditional, and Hybrid Challenges in Context* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007).

international community.”¹⁸ The most revolutionary of these thinkers don’t use the term “hybrid” at all. “Unrestricted warfare,” as proposed by People’s Liberation Army Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui claim [Clausewitz] “principles of warfare are no longer ‘using armed force to compel an enemy to submit to one’s will’, but rather are using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel an enemy to accept one’s interests.”¹⁹ This idea involves a truly long term approach to achieving strategic objectives, but most germane to hybrid warfare is the assertion that weapons, and their relative effectiveness, should no longer be measured by levels of lethality.²⁰ Common aspects of peaceful society such as economics, politics, immigration, and culture “will cause ordinary people and military alike to be greatly astonished at the fact that commonplace things that are close to them can also become weapons with which to engage in war.”²¹ Liang and Xiangsui would contend that warfare on such a wide spectrum would necessitate measuring the incremental achievement of a strategic objective to determine the most effective weapons in a particular arsenal. In summarizing Liang and Xiangsui’s theory, LTC Nathan Freier adequately covers the range of hybrid warfare by listing the complimentary use of selective violence along with “political agitation, social mobilization and political or economic assault at the international, national and subnational levels.”²² Unfortunately, Freier limits the target of this anticipated aggression to the United States, and to key allies as a means of disrupting U.S. interests, in what he

¹⁸ Jack McCuen, “Strategy of Hybrid War,” in *Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats: Perspectives for an Era of Persistent Conflict*, eds. Paul Brister, William H. Natter and Robert R. Tomes (New York, NY: Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, 2011), 70–82.

¹⁹ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Panama City: Pan American Publishing, 2002), xxi-xxii.

²⁰ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2–3. David Kilcullen describes the U.S. as trapped in a conventional thinking cycle that is blinded by its conviction of its own dominance. While America’s focus has been on conventional strength, other nations have moved to significantly reduce the role of conventional forces in the conduct of warfare by ‘weaponizing’ other dimensions of their strategic arsenals.

²¹ Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 16–17

²² Nathan P. Freier, *Strategic Competition and Resistance in the 21st Century: Irregular, Catastrophic, Traditional, and Hybrid Challenges in Context* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), 38. Freier calls these efforts “purposeful irregular resistance” where containment of the U.S. is the primary objective for competitor/ adversary states.

describes as a new type of anti-American containment conducted by rising competitors.²³ Freier hints at the military-like effects that might be achieved against U.S. interests through economic or political disruption, but his analysis does not cover how this same power could be used to disrupt a smaller, less developed state.

The weaponization of what Joseph Nye famously categorized as soft power is a key ingredient to the usefulness of studying hybrid warfare in more immediate applications, and are the best methods to meet the economic, diplomatic and informational aspects of hybrid threats as outlined by Secretary Gates.²⁴ While Nye characterized soft power as a generally positive means of attraction, these same mechanisms can be weaponized as forces of coercion and employed in lieu of, or in concert with, the application of violence. The diplomatic, informational, economic, financial, intelligence, and legal/ law enforcement portions of the DIME-FIL model of national power also figure very prominently in the definition of Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW).²⁵ 4GW, however, assumes that the nature of war would not change; only the antagonists and their motivations would be different.²⁶ 4GW comes close to realizing the components of hybrid conflict by “using all of a society’s networks—political, economic, social, and military—to carry on the fight,” but it is too oriented on the perspective of resistance and insurgency and becomes unnecessarily limited in pursuing an objective other than “immediate military victory” by attempting to convince

²³ Nathan P. Freier, *Known Unknowns: Unconventional “Strategic Shocks” in Defense Strategy Development* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 34. Freier points all of the efforts of hybrid campaigns toward containing U.S. influence without directly confronting the U.S. in a conventional military manner. The Russians are very likely interested in rolling back US/ Western influence in Eurasia, and these effects may be indicative of a Russian Grand Strategy, but the effects on the U.S. are not the sole reason for Russia to undertake a limited, hybrid action against its weaker neighbors. There are very real short-term strategic objectives that can be realized more safely and efficiently through hybrid means than with a full-scale military invasion.

²⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2004).

²⁵ Thomas X. Hammes, “Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation,” in *Unrestricted Warfare Symposium: Proceedings on Strategy, Analysis, and Technology, 14–15 March 2006*, ed. Ronald R. Luman (Laurel, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Applied Physics Laboratory, 2006), 65–88.

²⁶ Frank Hoffman, “The Hybrid Character of Modern Conflict,” in *Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats: Perspectives for an Era of Persistent Conflict*, eds. Paul Brister, William H. Natter and Robert R. Tomes (New York, NY: Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, 2011), 38.

the political leadership of an invading force that the continuation of the war is futile.²⁷ 4GW is not a formula *for* the invading force.

McCulloh and Johnson argued for the importance of understanding the nature and principles of hybrid warfare. They proposed seven principles of hybrid warfare that they supported with examinations of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War and the Soviet Partisan efforts on the Eastern Front from 1941–1945.²⁸ Unfortunately, their principles were built from the perspective of a lesser power employing hybrid techniques to counter the conventional advantage of a superior adversary. These principles assume an asymmetric disadvantage for a hybrid force and are not adequate for characterizing the nature of a hybrid conflict when undertaken by a conventionally advantaged aggressor.

Frank Hoffman is a leading advocate for the study of hybrid warfare. He credits “new wars,” “open source warfare,” “modern wars,” “polymorphic conflict,” “combinational wars,” and “4th Generation Warfare” as the feeder schools of thought that have both informed and stymied the thinking that has led to the emergence of the term hybrid warfare.²⁹ “Hybrid warfare is different because it addresses the difference in “how” the adversary plans to fight.”³⁰ Hoffman considers hybridity—which by definition is a mixture of two or more things—to be the combination of conventional forces, irregulars, terrorists and criminals. This framework helps conceptualize non-traditional actors (terrorists and criminals) as instruments of the state with a unique ability to shape an objective during a time of peace, but it also unnecessarily limits the scope of hybridity to a narrow range of a state’s means.

[There is an] increased merging ... of conflict and war forms. The potential for types of conflict that blur the distinction between war and peace, and combatants and non-combatants, appear to be on the rise.³¹

²⁷ Hammes, *Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation*, 65.

²⁸ Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson, “Hybrid Warfare,” *JSOU Report* 13–4 (August, 2013).

²⁹ Hoffman, *The Hybrid Character of Modern Conflict*, 37–38.

³⁰ Ibid., 38. Interestingly, Hoffman hits on the notion of “how” the adversary plans to fight, or the “way” that the means will be employed, but his definitions are usually referenced with emphasis on the means (conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal).

³¹ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 7.

Hoffman also highlights the idea that these elements have some level of centralized control. These activities have to be able to be coordinated and directed to achieve synergy that works toward desired political objectives. The implication is that the ability to direct action across all domains is a requirement to conduct hybrid warfare.

Hybrid wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.” These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects.³²

Hoffman later expanded his idea of the battlefield to include the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict—or the target state’s ability and will to resist—in Clausewitz’s terms.

Hybrid adversaries simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the battlespace to obtain their political objectives....directed and coordinated within the battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.³³

Hoffman specifically identified the blurring of the lines between war and peace, and supports this with the conceptualization of the war-like effects that can be achieved through criminal organizations and terrorists, against a target during a time of peace. What this framework takes for granted is the nature of an aggressor state that is comfortable employing terrorists and criminal networks to fulfill strategic objectives that violate another state’s sovereignty; an act of warfare. It then follows that if a state was willing to sponsor those types of actions to meet its strategic ends, the same state would be willing to employ economic, diplomatic, and informational efforts toward the same outcome. Therefore, hybridity must encompass a range of activity that is outside of the military forms of war and suitable for employment during a time of supposed peace.

³² Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, 14.

³³ Hoffman, *The Hybrid Character of Modern Conflict*, 40.

George Kennan, the father of containment theory, called this range of actions “political warfare.”

Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, *short of war*, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, and “white” propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of “friendly” foreign elements, “black” psychological warfare, and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.³⁴

Paul Brister points the concept of hybrid warfare back at the strategic utility of limited warfare. “The aim of military strategy is to create a dilemma for the enemy, and make him choose which objective he will defend, a challenge in the modern era due to the isolation of numerous potential objectives from interdiction by military force.”³⁵ Extending operational reach to affect these objectives may be difficult, but it is also a compelling argument for a hybrid form of war that transcends the purely military sphere.³⁶ Extending operational reach can also be interpreted not just as a function of projecting forces over physical distance, but as a means of disrupting a target around the barriers of international sanctions or the expected reactions of defensive alliances and

³⁴ George F. Kennan, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1948). Emphasis added.

³⁵ Paul Brister, “Revisiting the Gordian Knot: Strategic Considerations for Hybrid Warfare,” in *Hybrid Warfare and Transnational Threats: Perspectives for an Era of Persistent Conflict*, eds. Paul Brister, William H. Natter and Robert R. Tomes (New York, NY: Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, 2011): 51.

³⁶ Ronald R. Luman, “Introduction,” in *Unrestricted Warfare Symposium: Proceedings on Strategy, Analysis, and Technology, 14–15 March 2006*, ed. Ronald R. Luman (Laurel, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Applied Physics Laboratory, 2006). In discussing Liang and Xiangsui’s theory of Unrestricted Warfare, Luman makes the common mistake of assuming that asymmetry is only characterized by the weak attacking the strong, and that “unrestricted” means there are no rules, 2. He corrects this idea later when he explains that only the measures are unrestricted, but the objective is “the accomplishment of limited tailored objectives – a disciplined approach,” 2. Warfare remains limited, tailored, and disciplined only when there are very explicit rules. Hybrid warfare helps identify the asymmetry of strong-attacking weak using means that are designed to ensure the kinetic parts of the war stay as limited as the attacker desires. Luman describes the combatants in Unrestricted Warfare as “small, cell like units that have global reach,” 2. That is certainly true for some domains (cyber warfare, terrorism) where certain effects can be realized through cyberspace or through commercial travel to a vulnerable target. This cellular description only applies to certain elements of the hybrid threat, however, as there is still a place for conventionally organized maneuver forces.

other standards of deterrence theories.³⁷ For example, a target state's ability to defend a critical economic function is more likely to be degraded by a simultaneous cyber-attack on its banking institutions, blocking the importation of a critical resource, and the sabotage of a refinery in a chokepoint for international shipping than it is by a tank brigade moving across a border, particularly if the target nation has domestic defense laws or alliances that would only be activated in response to a clear conventional violation of its sovereignty.³⁸ "The object of strategy should be to establish political systems that even the defeated finds acceptable. This focuses violence to the point that certain institutions survive to serve as the structures of functioning governance after a conflict."³⁹ In the hybrid context, this means that a medium such as economic warfare should be used up to the point where it breaks an enemy's ability or will to resist, but not to the point where an economic system is irretrievably shattered. Hybrid warfare is therefore expected to be deliberately restrained in its application.

Taken as a whole, the preceding literature shows that the components of hybrid warfare are not new.⁴⁰ The mounted cavalryman and the bow were also not "new" when the first outriders of the Golden Horde set out on the steppe. It was the unique combination and employment of known capabilities that made the Mongols so difficult to counter. Hybrid warfare is similarly a new perspective for an old way of warfare, and its

³⁷ Mike Winnerstig, *Tools of Destabilization: Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence in the Baltic States* (Stockholm, Sweden: FOIR, 2014): 4.

³⁸ Michael Moberg, James Mashiri and Charly Salenius-Pasternak, "What if Russia Demands a Naval Base in Finland Or Invades a Swedish Island?" *Suomen Kuvalehti*, no. 9/2015 (27 February, 2015). Several Finnish military officers war-gamed three different scenarios where Russian hybrid warfare techniques might circumvent Finland's national defensive measures by not presenting the conditions required to trigger domestic emergency laws or defensive alliance responses. Their three scenarios involve plausible threats to their national strategic access to open transit of the Baltic Sea. The idea of not triggering defense mechanisms has been a central discussion within NATO following the Crimean crisis as NATO members sought assurances of what actions would precipitate an Article V response of the alliance.

³⁹ Brister, *Revisiting the Gordian Knot: Strategic Considerations for Hybrid Warfare*, 51.

⁴⁰ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. David Kilcullen describes Hybrid Warfare's importance, particularly as conducted by nation-states as "new actors with new technology threaten new or transfigured ways of war, but the old threats also remain and have to be dealt with in the same time and space, stressing the resources and overloading the systems of western militaries," 5–6. See also: David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013). Kilcullen also describes hybrid threats as the combination of state and irregular forces that will employ any variety of weapons and tactics to "minimize detection and retaliation," 105.

numerous forms have taken on new significance in the contemporary world due to globalization, mass communications, and the speed of technological innovation. It is distinct from the narrow options of asymmetric necessity that are shaped by the limited means available to a stateless terrorist organization.

Hybrid warfare is instead the deliberate choice of a state or pseudo-state that could introduce larger degrees of conventional force, but instead attempts to realize some of the objectives of limited war through other than purely conventional military means. In a hybrid campaign, traditional military forces have a role that may be significant, or may be all but invisible. While at least the plausible threat of overwhelming force is an important component, traditional military force is the lesser, supporting effort of a hybrid campaign. Clausewitz' claim that war is "a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" implies a distinct point where political discourse stops and military contest begins.⁴¹ Hybrid warfare needs no such delineation. The goals of warfare are still political, but the use of force is not restricted to a time of overt war. Hybrid warfare is also not defined by any new technology or ability in one domain, but when those means are available they are added to an aggressor state's arsenal to support or take the place of other means of state power as needed. For the purposes of this research, hybrid warfare will be defined as: the synchronized application of political and military forms of war, through direct and indirect means, in order to satisfy strategic objectives while minimizing the political risks associated with traditional war.

D. APPROACH

This research project began with the following hypothesis: Following the end of the Cold War and the spectacular display of overwhelming Western conventional firepower and technology during the 1991 Gulf War, rising powers have continued to pursue strategic objectives while taking care to minimize the risk to their conventional armed forces. These actions employ a variety of combinations of forms as they are adapted to particular targets and geopolitical situations, yet they require certain conditions that can help identify when they are taking place and suggest what range of

⁴¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

counteractions might be successful. If rising nation states are using hybrid warfare to impose their will on weaker neighbors, then hybrid aggression may not be inhibited by conventional means of deterrence. The economic and military alliances formed to bring stability between regional partners could also be undermined without activating the defensive measures that are built to react to clear acts of overt aggression.

This research involved a heuristic analysis of multiple case studies in an effort to identify common forms and conditions that will assist in developing a general theory of hybrid warfare. The case studies selected all involve modern Russia under Vladimir Putin due to Russia's determined efforts to realize the potential of combining political warfare and violence. Russia is a pioneer in this mode of conflict and is worthy of study. Russia has repeatedly demonstrated aggression toward smaller adjacent neighboring states. As the coming pages will illustrate, this aggression has been to secure limited political objectives and not the outright capitulation of the target state. By limiting the cases to post-1991, the Gulf War watershed moment described by Liang and Xiangsui, this study will examine contemporary Russian conflicts whose hybrid nature may be partially enabled by emerging technology, and also limited in scale out of potential concern for provoking a significant military response from the West. Russia has a wide menu of state means in the form of a relatively developed economy, technical sector, diplomatic core, and media enterprise, in addition to a relative advantage (compared to its adjacent neighbors) in conventional military power. These available means distinguish the use of hybrid warfare as a matter of choice, as opposed to a weak entity that employs any means at their disposal out of necessity. The case studies examined were:

- Russia—2008 Georgian War
- Russia—2014 Annexation of Crimea
- Russia—2014 War in Donbas, east Ukraine

Unfortunately, DIME-FIL is too simplistic to adequately analyze a hybrid campaign, as, for example, "M" would attempt to encompass the range of military forms from conventional to irregular to terrorism to nuclear warfare in one single category without consideration for the level of unique utility that each subordinate form might have. James Callard and Peter Faber categorized Liang and Xiangsui's "10,000 forms of

beyond-limits combined war” as military forms of war, non-military forms of war, and above-military forms of war (Figure 1). Each of these categories contains nine forms of warfare, resulting in a menu list of 27 items that can be employed in any variety of combinations against an enemy.⁴² These identified forms are by no means exhaustive, but they provide an adequate frame for beginning to examine the efforts beyond pure force that may be employed in the pursuit of strategic objectives.

Figure 1. Callard and Faber’s 27 Forms of Warfare, Further Divided as Military and Political Warfare

Military Warfare		Political Warfare	
Military Forms of War		Non-Military Forms of War	Above-Military Forms of War
Nuclear Warfare		Financial Warfare	Cultural Warfare
Conventional Warfare		Trade Warfare	Diplomatic Warfare
Bio/Chemical Warfare		Resources Warfare	Network Warfare
Ecological Warfare		Economic / aid Warfare	Intelligence Warfare
Space Warfare		Legal/ Moral Warfare	Psychological Warfare
Electronic/ Info. Warfare		Sanction Warfare	Technological Warfare
Guerrilla Warfare		Media/ Propaganda Warfare	Smuggling Warfare
Terrorist Warfare		Ideological Warfare	Drug Warfare
Concussion Warfare		Forced Population Shifts/ Migration	Fictitious/ Fabrication Warfare

Adapted from: James Callard and Peter Faber, “An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/ Spring, 2002): 63.

Before evaluating the cases for instances of combined military and political warfare, it was necessary to first examine Russian military thinking for the requisite understanding of utilizing political tools as weapons and for the general perception it holds of international relations. Each case was then reviewed for evidence of a Russian strategic objective that violates the target state’s sovereignty. Following a hypothesis that

⁴² James Callard and Peter Faber, “An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Winter/ Spring, 2002): 63.

hybrid warfare is essentially a way to minimize the risk associated with conventional military warfare and that surprise is therefore an essential aspect during a shift to overt military force, conditions and methods that help mask this dynamic change in the interstate relationship were then analyzed. The Callard-Faber model was then tested in each case in order to identify the various forms of warfare employed against the target state.

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II. HYBRID WARFARE: TOWARD A THEORETICAL MODEL

In order to make a case for the strategic importance of hybrid warfare, it is first necessary to examine the fundamentals of strategy, several applicable theories of power, how power is used to deter and ultimately where a hybrid approach to warfare nests within some of these commonly held concepts. It is well beyond the scope of this project to summarize all of the thinking on topics as widely fielded as strategy, power, and deterrence. Instead, this chapter serves as a very brief overview of several of the most commonly accepted assertions, and only to the depth were the objectives of warfare—the tradition role of the military in the Clausewitzian trinity—may be demonstrated to be attainable through other means.

A. STRATEGY

In its simplest form, strategy describes the desired ends that can be achieved and the ways those ends can be reached with available means. Colin Gray refines this concept in the Clausewitzian tradition with his emphasis on the role of coercive power by “insist[ing] that strategy is about the use made of force and the threat of force for the goals of policy.”⁴³ Strategic skill is found in the effective bridging of the gap between the instruments of power and the desired policy outcome. An effective strategy therefore has to balance the desire to reach a certain result, the available instruments at an actor’s disposal, and an appropriate appreciation of how those instruments can be employed toward the desired end. The strategic means available to a state are often also called the elements of national power: Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economics, Finance, Intelligence and Legal/ Law Enforcement (DIME-FIL). Historically, when a state looked at a neighbor and determined to seize all or part of the neighbor’s territory (the strategic end), it has turned to its means of seizing territory (the military) and then formulated the way (warfare) for the latter to bring about the former. The strength of the state’s military, specifically the standing Army, is typically the first figure that a state uses to determine

⁴³ Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 14.

its ability to attack others or to defend itself from attack.⁴⁴ This measurement of strength is of course relative to the comparable strength of a potential adversary.⁴⁵ The military has historically been categorized as a unitary element—the so-called “big M” in DIME—regardless of the sea, air, or land domain in which any particular portion of the military is tailored to operate. Western states also traditionally prefer to perceive a binary quality to their relationship with other states; meaning that the two countries are either in a state of peace or war. Granted that there can be degrees of good relations from a close alliance to bitter competition, but in the post-Westphalian order the directing of the state’s instrument of force to cross into the territory of another represents a change in the nature of the inter-state relationship from peace to war.

Hybrid warfare changes the strategic dynamic by dividing the military forms of war into elements whose employment may remain below the threshold of traditional war and synergizing those efforts with the coercive and destructive effects with non-military forms of war. “Hybridity” is found in the combination of the various political and violent means, and the synergistic effect of that combination produces a unique way to realize an end.⁴⁶ By splitting the “big- M” into conventional forces, special operations forces, paramilitary forces, surrogate groups, saboteurs, and terrorists, the state can more easily envision options for conducting a certain level of violence against another state with

⁴⁴ Naval and Air Forces can affect the calculus of relative strength, but land combat power is the traditional benchmark for a state’s ability to wage war and defend against aggression. Nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence are unique factors in shaping states’ objectives for war.

⁴⁵ There are numerous factors that may influence a calculation of strength that exceed just the numbers of fighting men in uniform or main battle tanks. These can include the state’s production capacity, population of fighting age males, ability to convert economy to war time production, food production, and availability of raw materials, to name a few.

⁴⁶ Nadia Schadlow, “The Problem with Hybrid Warfare,” *War on the Rocks* (April 2, 2015). Schadlow is correct in observing that the “hybrid” definition refers to the different means that are used. The level, extent, and synergistic attributes of the hybrid effort, however makes hybrid warfare a way of reaching a strategic end. This becomes more apparent when the means being combined are not all aspects of the military forms of war, but when non-military forms are used to achieve military-like effects. Take the ubiquitous ball bearing factory during World War II for example. If blowing up the factory is the only way to realize the desired end of interrupting the manufacture of a critical component, then air sorties, artillery, or saboteur are interchangeable for their kinetic military effect. If the same end can be achieved before the onset of military hostilities by controlling the factory’s labor force, forcing the factory into bankruptcy, directing criminals to steal factory parts, or purchasing the factory outright, the target state’s ability to rely on its domestic war time capabilities begins to be undermined. When this is intended and is synchronized to other acts of warfare, the war has assumed a hybrid nature that began well before the traditional clash of military power.

varying degrees of attribution and without committing to a full status of open war. This conceptualization allows the state to consider new ways to reach desired goals by degrading the will and ability of the opponent to resist through violence, while decreasing the level of conventional force put at risk to reach a similar outcome. Because the acknowledged or overt participation of military forces may not occur until late in a hybrid campaign, the initial ‘military’ violence (surrogate sponsorship, terrorism, sabotage) should occur during a time of supposed peace, before the targeted state or other actors recognize that a condition of hostility exists.

The conclusion of warfare traditionally results when one of the belligerents is either annihilated in a decisive battle or is exhausted beyond the point of further resistance.⁴⁷ An aggressor state typically has three, non-mutually exclusive choices when considering the use of force against another: a limited aims strategy, rapid offensive strategy, or a strategy of attrition.⁴⁸ The goal of a limited aims strategy is to seize a desired objective through surprise, assume a defensive posture, and then challenge the victim to either accept the new situation as political reality or to respond by commencing a war of attrition against a fully alerted enemy in the defense.⁴⁹ A rapid offensive strategy does not focus on the territory of the enemy, but instead has the primary objective of destroying the victim’s armed forces before they can be fully mobilized.⁵⁰ A strategy of attrition also seeks the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces, but through an exhaustive, protracted conflict that the aggressor calculates will be won through his ability to outlast his opponent.⁵¹

The strategy of attrition is the simplest description of conventional warfare. As the main effort is defined by the overt clash of military forces and all other elements of

⁴⁷Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 135–136.

⁴⁸ Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 35. See also: John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 23–65.

⁴⁹ Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, 35–36. This strategy could be ascribed to the Crimea’s occupation, but it would not encompass the larger Russian effort against Ukraine.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

national power are in support of that effort, it is difficult to argue a case for hybrid warfare when considering the military dimension alone. However, in Chapter 3, Alexander Svechin's *Strategy of Attrition* will describe the use of political warfare to exhaust a target state's military forces. A rapid offensive strategy might be facilitated through hybrid warfare as a means of preparing the battlefield, but it becomes less hybrid and significantly more "conventional" when the regular echelons of an aggressor's force become the main effort. The limited aims strategy is particularly well suited to a hybrid warfare campaign. The aggressor determines the physical extent of the desired objective, and then focuses his political warfare efforts at undermining the target state's ability to project control over that territory well in advance of the application of decisive force.

B. POWER

There are two traditions regarding the relationship between conflict and politics: realism and liberalism. "For the realist, the central problem of international politics is war and the use of force, and the central actors are states."⁵² The realist is pragmatic in that he expects that others will try to take what he is unable to defend so he must demonstrate strength to ensure his sovereignty. By maximizing one's own power, one minimizes the ability of other states to threaten one's security.⁵³ At a certain point however, the realist becomes strong enough that he begins considering what he might be able to take from a weaker neighbor. The "offensive realist" does not even think there is a choice; the only way he can better his odds of survival is to have more relative power than his potential enemies, a gulf he can widen by physically reducing his adversary's strength.⁵⁴ Realists see the contemporary international system as anarchic—there is no central or governing power- so the only things that enforce order are the individual states' ability and willingness to fight to maintain the status quo.⁵⁵

⁵² Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2003), 4.

⁵³ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 21.

⁵⁵ Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 3.

Neo-liberalism envisions “a global society that functions alongside the states and sets part of the context for the states.”⁵⁶ Liberalism promotes the view not just of international governing bodies and legal restraint, but also that interdependent trade, monetary systems, and cross border communication have evolved into a transnational society where conflict is less likely. This is the essence of globalization, and is the preferred view of the world generally held in the West. Realists counter that there will always be a potential for a future state of war and one had better be ready to protect against it. Offensive realism is not a popular concept in the liberal-minded West because it tends to be at odds with our traditionally optimistic values.⁵⁷ It is the difference in world view of relation power that explains why a country like Russia would suddenly seize Crimea, or why China would rapidly expand into its neighbors’ territorial waters. If a state views the world through the realist lens, specifically from the position of offensive realism, that state’s actions often appear irrational to liberal outsiders as those actions undermine the best interests of the international community. They appear much more pragmatic when they are seen to increase the relative power, and therefore the chances of survival, of the aggressor state. While this realist perspective might be depressing, “it behooves us to see the world as it is, not as we would like it to be.”⁵⁸

It would be a mistake for a weaker power, or the international community, to assume that an aggressor shares a similar view of the strategic options that are available to each side. If the weaker state prefers the position of power liberalism, he would be inclined to look for cooperative strategies that would yield the best result for both parties. If the aggressor is an offensive-realist, the parties of liberalism would continuously be confounded as the realist regularly made and then broke agreements or pursued strategies that were painful for both sides. The realist views international competition as zero-sum; there is a winner and a loser. Pursuing a win-win strategy for a realist only makes sense if

⁵⁶ Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 5. The term “liberalism” will be used through the rest of this study in keeping with the sources referenced. Classical liberalism involves the freedom of the individual, and neo-liberalism is the inter-relations of states through an agreed upon context.

⁵⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 23.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

his gains are greater than and outpacing his opponent's, because the result is the realist's greater relative power. For the same reason, the realist is also willing to accept a loss, so long as the opponent's loss is greater and the gap is increasing.

One useful definition of power is described by the ability a nation can exert to positively (attract) or negatively (coerce) influence another entity in order to reach a preferred outcome.⁵⁹ States that employ a mix of hard and soft power approaches employ what Joseph Nye calls "smart power" as a means of converting available resources into desired outcomes.⁶⁰ Nye uses the analogy of disaster relief to demonstrate how military forces can be used in a "soft" manner to engender good will. A basic premise of hybrid warfare is that the inverse is also possible and that normally benign instruments of soft power can be weaponized to coerce and inflict harm. When the desired outcome is the breaking of an adversary's ability or will to resist the imposition of the aggressor's will, then smart power is synonymous with hybrid warfare.

Power projection is the ability to exercise force relative to distance. Historically, those who are most vulnerable to an aggressor are those along its contiguous borders, making armies, or land-power, the traditional yardstick for measuring a nation's existing strength.⁶¹ Adversaries separated by bodies of water require naval forces to control the intermediate maritime domain, exert force on maritime vessels and ports, transport invading forces and sustain those forces through a campaign.⁶² Stephen Biddle offers a definition of military power that promotes the importance of the land domain by emphasizing the military's primary mission of controlling territory during mid to high intensity "continental warfare." A military's power is measured in its ability to

⁵⁹ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011): 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶¹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 43–44.

⁶² Ibid., 44. Mearsheimer addresses the value of naval and air forces to projecting power and deterrence. He fundamentally disagrees with the notion that air or naval power alone constitutes a valuable measure of national power. Those forces can play a critical role in degrading or destroying an enemy but it is ultimately the role of the land force to be decisive. Mearsheimer did address the 1999 NATO air war against Yugoslavia, which is often used to make the case that airpower alone can determine the outcome of a conflict. He finds that this conflict was an exception rather than a rule, and that Milosevic's capitulation was likely due to a number of domestic socio-political factors rather than the capitulation of an entire national system as a result of the aerial bombardment.

accomplish this mission through “the destruction of hostile forces while preserving one’s own, the ability to take and hold ground, and the time required to do so.”⁶³ In the age of an interdependent global economy, Internet based banking and mass communications systems there are increasingly innovative possibilities for exerting coercive force on a state that is not immediately adjacent to an aggressor through cyber-attack, propaganda saturation, and economic or financial disruption. While hybrid warfare is not contingent upon any of these, or any future innovation, its practitioner will recognize the possibilities that these domains provide to increase his options for action that would have once been beyond the reach of his land forces.

C. BALANCE OF POWER

A balance of power typically exists when a state weighs its elements of power and upon comparing them to a rival finds that neither side has a distinct advantage. This lack of advantage means that any attempt to directly challenge an adversary would risk incurring a cost that outweighs the expected value of the desired objective. Accurately estimating the existing balance of power, however, is a highly subjective process that requires a holistic understanding of an adversary’s capability and willingness to resist coercion. This calculus is made more difficult with the presence of defensive alliances, international agreements, economic relationships, and historical or cultural linkage between an adversary and other entities.⁶⁴ Failure to accurately assess the balance of power has resulted in numerous strategic blunders throughout history. For example, Saddam Hussein miscalculated the cost of attempting to secure a larger stake in the world oil market when he decided to invade Kuwait in 1990. The Iraqi Army was vastly larger and better equipped than their Kuwaiti counterparts and Hussein correctly surmised that a military victory would be relatively inexpensive (cost being a factor not just of monetary value but also the losses to his forces as an overall depreciation of his strategic means).

⁶³ Stephen D. Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

⁶⁴ Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, 14. Biddle believes that the employment of forces is the best indicator of a nation’s military power. He is highly critical of models that focus on the traditional factors of numerical superiority (preponderance), technology, or inflexible constants that represent force employment.

Hussein failed to anticipate the change to the power dynamic that would not materialize until *after* he invaded Kuwait, forcing other offensive-realist states to have to consider the unknown elements of force that might figure in the relative-power calculation. He also failed to understand the importance the international community would place on stability of the international energy market. As a result, what Hussein expected to be a relatively low-cost adventure resulted in the near annihilation of his land forces and a subsequent attempt to exploit this weakened power status by both Shia and Kurdish rebel groups.

D. HYBRID WARFARE

There is no existing theory of hybrid warfare; however, the term has been used to loosely describe a variety of forms of war without examining the nature of the aggressor state. Hybrid warfare is a natural complement to Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism and the struggle to maximize relative power. Offensive realism functions under several assumptions that are also applicable in framing the appeal of hybrid warfare:

1. The natural state of the international system is anarchy.
2. [States] inherently possess some military capability.
3. States can never be sure about other state's intentions.
4. Survival [territorial integrity and political autonomy] is the primary goal of the [state].
5. [States] are rational actors.⁶⁵

This conceptualization is helpful to visualize the role of hybrid warfare from a non-Western point of view. While Westerners may prefer to hold a liberal view of the international arena, rising regional powers—with expectations of regional primacy—likely have a world view that is much closer to the offensive-realist's perspective. Mearsheimer's list requires one addition in order for an offensive-realist to be capable of pursuing hybrid warfare:

6. States inherently possess other than military means of interacting with other states.

⁶⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 30–31. Mearsheimer uses the term “great power” in his listing of the assumptions for offensive realism. I have substituted “great power” with “state” here to prevent confusion.

An offensive-realist who is willing to use force to ensure its dominance over potential adversaries is likely to consider all means at the state's disposal for the same purpose.

There are three principal considerations that determine the 'hybrid' of warfare: 1) the nature of the aggressor state, 2) the presence of requisite conditions, and 3) the primacy and combination of other-than-conventional military forms of warfare. "Hybrid" by definition requires a combination of different types of warfare. As combining efforts within the military forms of warfare, conventional and irregular, or surrogate and terrorist, is fairly common, it is too narrow in scope to serve describe the unique effects that a hybrid campaign can actually achieve. Instead, warfare should only be considered "hybrid" if it aims to achieve the objectives of strategy with a combination of political (non-military, above-military) and military forms of warfare.

The advantage of hybrid warfare is found in the unique ways it provides a state for employing existing elements of national power in coercive pursuit of strategic ends. There are "three different aspects of relational power: commanding change, controlling agendas, and establishing preferences."⁶⁶ The case for warfare is easier to make for the first two aspects, but to the degree that preferences are established against the will of the target state in order to set the conditions for the aggressor's domination, and coercive force is either used or threatened to shape these preferences, then the aggressor's actions can be considered warfare. This distinction can create a level of angst for those who believe that "warfare" is defined solely by violent, military involvement, or for those who think "wars" between cola companies and television networks has completely excised any value from the word. Warfare in the traditionally non-military domains is also easy to mistake for aggressive competition or criminality (and so those activities can also be mistaken for an act of war by those who are so inclined).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 11.

⁶⁷ Recognizing when these acts are isolated incidents of criminality or when they constitute a deliberate effort on the part of an opposing state to further a national strategic objective (potentially an act of war) is a requisite function for any power that attempts to counter hybrid warfare. The ability to see these actions for what they are requires not only adopting the adversary's perspective for power relations, but also viewing the actions in their entire context and not as isolated points.

Hybrid warfare requires an evaluation of both the existing balance of power and the mechanisms of deterrence to identify the thresholds or constraints for those defensive mechanisms to be activated. The aggressor must then be able to marshal a significant degree of the means available to the state and apply them deliberately, synchronizing their effects across all domains, in an effort to reduce the potential risk of conventional military warfare. The conventional military element of power, the “big M,” plays an important role in this effort, but that role is primarily as a threat of far greater escalation of force against the target state, rather than as the primary instrument of aggressive policy. By not committing the entirety of the state’s conventional military force, the aggressor protects that force from destruction, circumvents many of the deterrent mechanisms that are built to trigger responses to conventional attack, and forces any response to be measured lest the aggressor be “provoked” into escalating the level of conventional violence involved with the conflict. Hybrid warfare therefore is true to the maxim of economy of force—achieving the desired ends in an efficient manner.

Conventional occupations not only face the taxing prospect of countering insurgent movements, but the introduction of regular forces also incurs an increased level of international and domestic political risk. Conventional force is usually attributable to an aggressor, making the sponsor vulnerable to counterattack, international sanctions, or other punitive measures. Not only do conventional losses degrade an aggressor’s aggregate combat power, but mounting casualties can increase domestic political resistance to continued involvement in a conflict.⁶⁸ Many nations have a strong aversion to casualties when a war is not seen as existential in nature.⁶⁹ In hybrid warfare the conventional force may be the strategic reserve while other forms of military violence including surrogates, terrorists, and saboteurs remain available for utilization at a much lower threshold for commitment of power, and with a different degree of domestic political risk for the aggressor who maintains a modicum of plausible deniability.

⁶⁸ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 30.

⁶⁹ Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 11.

1. The Nature of the Aggressor

Hybrid warfare requires an aggressor to be willing to violate a target state's sovereignty, to include the promotion of violence, during a time of supposed peace. This perspective contrasts with the Western preference for delineation between peace and war (with an admittedly “gray zone” between the two that has been the space of covert action, propaganda, and less-than-war coercive or punitive military actions).⁷⁰ American military thinkers are prone to view the non-military elements of national power, DIME-FIL, as the tools available to meet strategic objectives prior to a “critical moment” when “M” becomes the primary instrument for continuing the policy.⁷¹ The non-military forms of national power that are necessary for warfare to be truly “hybrid” are often most effectively applied well before the existence of an easily definable state of open warfare. This temporal disassociation from a traditional linear view of a road to war between two states is a critical component in conceptualizing the value of hybrid warfare. Once that determination has been made and the aggressor, mindful of the existing deterrent forces, has begun to direct its national power toward that end, a state of war exists because the aggressor perceives it as being so, despite any formal declaration or use of overt military force.

⁷⁰ Kennan, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare*. See also: Nadia Schadlow, “Peace and War: The Space Between,” *War on the Rocks* (August 8, 2014). Schadlow calls the gray zone “the space between” politics and military action. Whatever the name, or whatever hang-ups exist for effective Western policy in that area, it would be a mistake to mirror-image the same perception of a confusing zone between peace and war onto an offensive-realist like Russia.

⁷¹ David E. Johnson, “Fighting the “Islamic State”: The Case for Ground Forces,” *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2015): 16. Johnson uses the American inclination to differentiate between peace and war to make a case for ground forces to combat the Islamic State but his summary of DIME-FIL and the oft quoted Clausewitzian dictum that war is “policy continued by other means” serves as a very succinct summary of the conceptual difficulties that Americans will have regarding hybrid warfare. The hybrid warfare practitioner must be able to secure his strategic objectives through all means, including violence, before crossing a threshold of traditional war. Johnson’s larger argument is also pertinent to this discussion as he is admonishing U.S. policy makers for assuming that a fight against the IS requires the same COIN centric nation-building methodologies that were popularized during the Iraq war. Hybrid warfare similarly requires certain conditions for it to be a feasible approach to securing strategic objectives. The absence of these conditions will necessitate either abandoning the campaign or transitioning to more traditional warfare as will be discussed in the Russia –Donbas case study.

a. Synchronizing Elements of National Power

Aggressors whose governments are centralized and authoritarian in nature possess a distinct advantage in synchronizing all of the elements of national power. While this is more reflective of the nature of the state, it is not an absolute prerequisite. Liberal states can nationalize economies and information domains, but this is usually indicative of a state of total war and cannot be regularly implemented for limited, hybrid warfare without undermining the liberal nature of the state. Synchronization of the political forms of warfare enables the aggressor state to obscure its intentions, isolate the objective from the target state's control, weaken the target state and international resolve, dissuade external influence, and magnify the perceived cost of resistance.

One of the most critical dimensions in fusing the efforts of military and political warfare is the overlapping application of information warfare. "In the information age...the outcomes are shaped not merely by the side whose army wins but also by whose story wins."⁷² Information warfare is used to separate the objective area's population from the target state, to manufacture legitimacy by fabricating a pretext for "intervention," to prevent the target state from responding effectively, and to reduce the chances of external interference. The most successful hybrid campaign will break the enemy's ability or will to resist ahead of the overt introduction of force—the nature of which can now be characterized as an instrument of stability (i.e., peacekeepers) instead of the instrument that created the instability.

State control of all print media, television and radio broadcasts and Internet access makes achieving information dominance over the domestic audience much more likely. To the degree that this control includes the target state, the themes and messages can directly undermine the target population's will to resist. In the spheres where the aggressor's message has to compete with the international press and an unregulated Internet, the specificity of themes are less important than the saturation of these domains with the disinformation to help obscure the aggressor's actions. The goal in this domain is not to generate support so much as it is to continue to mask intentions and to

⁷² Nye, *The Future of Power*, 19.

undermine international resolve by planting doubt about the nature of the conflict or the involvement of the aggressor. Similarly, economic warfare toward a specific end is much easier to orchestrate when the state directly controls the economic means of power. Western nations use economic pressure to attempt to force other states to make certain choices, but marshalling all of the various parts of a free market toward that end is extremely difficult. The impact of information themes and economic coercion can be enhanced through the selective application of violence against the target state.

b. Employing Limited Levels of Violence

A hybrid aggressor must be willing to employ or threaten to use select levels of violence against a target state through the formation and sponsorship of terrorists, resistance movements, agitators and saboteurs in order to strike targets that will exacerbate tensions, undermine the target state's governance in an area, and enhance the effects of efforts in other domains. These kinetic actions are meant to compliment other political efforts to separate the objective from the target state's sphere of control. The combined efforts may be aimed at isolating a specific objective or at subverting the target state more generally. This means that violence can either be focused near the expected line of contact (the "front," or boundary of the contested area) or throughout the target state's strategic depth.⁷³ The aggressor may also mobilize conventional military forces under the auspices of training exercises, weapons tests, border security drills, snap inspections, or increased naval and air patrols. While a mobilized training exercise near a border can be a convenient pretext before an invasion, the very visible mobilization and maneuver of forces is first intended to amplify the effects of information operations or other coercive pressures. It is important that the reminder of conventional power not be seen principally as a communications device for signaling the adversary. They are an instrument of coercion, and the threat of their employment should be made to compel the

⁷³ "Strategic depth" is used to describe the potential for hybrid warfare to reach any point of the target state's industrial, social, economic, financial, political, or informational space. This is the true nature of non-linear war in that conflict does not occur solely at the point of military contact, but potentially at every point of the target state's society, depending on the aggressor's available means.

target to accept the aggressor's will.⁷⁴ The individual components of hybrid warfare are interchangeable as long as they can achieve the desired effects. By controlling the amount of violence as a means of providing coercive leverage to diplomatic, informational, or economic progress, the aggressor also maximizes its ability to exploit international diplomatic efforts to end the conflict once the violence escalates.

2. Conditions for Hybrid Warfare

Given that an aggressor is an offensive realist with the ability to synchronize all elements of national power and a willingness to employ violence during a time of peace, the hybrid actor needs a strategic end toward which it can direct its efforts. At some point, the aggressor will determine the target state's ability to protect the objective has been significantly reduced and the aggressor will dynamically change the inter-state relationship through unexpected force. This change happens on the aggressor's initiative and is based on an assessment of how quickly the objective can be accomplished and the level of violence reduced to prevent a determined resistance by the target state or an intervention from third parties.

a. Determining Strategic Goals

Warfare is conducted in pursuit of a political objective—the strategic end—and it can either be total or limited in scope.⁷⁵ It can include the complete destruction of an adversary's ability or will to resist, or only the force necessary for the aggressor to impose his will in a desired space. For the practice of hybrid warfare, an aggressor state must first establish strategic goals that violate a neighbor's sovereignty, toward which it can direct the non-military elements of state power, prior to introducing conventional

⁷⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *American Military Strategy* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1986), 16. Huntington's description of the coercive role of the military was meant to describe American forces, but this caution applies to hybrid actors as well. The point is that military muscle isn't flexed just to send messages. In part this speaks to the believability that overwhelming force is actually going to be introduced into a conflict because that is the aggressor's actual intent.

⁷⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*. Clausewitz identified the different military objectives that would be associated with either limited or total warfare. In limited warfare, such as the occupation of a contested territory, the attacker's aim is to quickly occupy the terrain and then assume a defensive posture that will make any effort to retake it more costly for the victim. In total warfare, the objective of the military is to destroy the victim state's means of resistance – which Clausewitz equated with the target state's armed forces.

force. The understanding of the strategic goal, and that the imposition of the aggressor's will is the determinative point of victory is what distinguishes the hybrid warfare mindset from the war-or-peace binary conception preferred by liberal states. For example, a state that believes itself to be at peace might still seek to gain a competitive economic advantage over another state, or might attempt to influence a political process toward a preferred outcome, but the goal of these activities is to manipulate the atmosphere of the relational environment with recognition of mutual sovereignty. In a perceived state of war, those same processes are used to force an opponent to accept conditions dictated by the aggressor in direct contravention of sovereignty.⁷⁶ Inherent in selecting hybrid warfare as the way to pursue desired ends, is the calculation of the aggressor's strength relative to the target state, and a respect for the incalculable response of the international community. While every effort is made to mask, obfuscate, and deny the pursuit of offensive objectives, there always lies the risk of external factors driving a foreign response to the crisis. Minimizing these "known unknowns" is the principle reason for a hybrid approach to warfare as opposed to the straightforward invasions that have marked the larger history of inter-state conflict.

b. Masking the Dynamic Change to the Status Quo

States that determine to seek political objectives through hybrid warfare necessarily need to conceal their intentions from the outset so that the efforts of diplomatic, economic, and informational coercion are less readily identified as acts of hostility and countered in kind. While the aggressor may not delineate between peace and war, he is keenly aware that others do. He uses this awareness to his advantage by avoiding the thresholds that will lead the target state to officially change the status of the relationship to open warfare. The aggressor also uses the instruments of the liberal international order: UN mandates, international treaties, environmental laws, commercial agreements, etc., to his advantage for as long as they serve his objectives. When these instruments negatively impact his relational power, he will set them aside in favor of

⁷⁶ This concept can lead to some interesting conclusions about the perspective of a transaction where one side believes it is pursuing its interests in a peacetime environment, while the other has a view of a constant state of war and believes it is being forced to accept the dominant state's will only because it lacks the ability to resist.

promoting his own survival.⁷⁷ At some point, the aggressor will chose to dynamically change the political relationship with the target state. This is the moment of vulnerability for the aggressor when his intentions suddenly become known and when he might be countered before he consolidates his control over the objective. Unlike traditional warfare, the aggressor needs to prevent a gradual increase in tensions, matching increases in defensive postures, and the linear increase in belligerence which is expected to precede a traditional military conflict. Instead, the aggressor masks any buildup in forces behind claims of maneuvers, readiness inspections, or other security activity. The aggressor retains the initiative and conceals the sudden introduction of forces behind other significant world events that are dominating the attention of the international media while employing deception operations to hide the change in activity for as long as possible. Any dynamic action involving the use of military force should also be calculated to achieve the desired objective and then dramatically reduce the associated violence in the shortest time possible in order to reduce the motivation for international intervention. The goal is to present the world with a *fait accompli*, where intervention would be the cause of additional violence, not the solution.

An important aspect of hybrid warfare is non-linearity in the application of power. At any point, the perceived nature of diplomacy, the audience or message of an information campaign or the selective application of violence might change direction in order to exploit opportunities, respond to changing pressures, bypass some form of resistance, or otherwise maintain the aggressor's initiative. Hybrid campaigns are defined by the level of adaptability they afford to the aggressor before the full commitment of his national combat power.⁷⁸ This level of adaptability is predicated upon an understanding of the battlefield, and the existing balances of power. As no two situations are ever likely to be identical, it would be illogical to presume the existence of a traditional doctrine for hybrid warfare beyond the most general principles. Hybrid warfare requires a plan that is

⁷⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 24–37.

⁷⁸ Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?*, 17. Colin Gray specifies that “adaptability must be regarded as a cardinal military virtue.” The case for hybrid warfare is true to this virtue as it seeks to constantly change the application of different forms of war to achieve military results before the military force has been placed at risk.

very clear, has multiple branches and sequels, and yet is shallow enough in detail that it remains as flexible as possible. Recognizing its employment by others will be a challenge in that the hybrid aggressor will not likely follow a specific template pattern of behavior.

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III. RUSSIAN POLITICAL-MILITARY THINKING: THE PATH TO CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

Hybrid warfare is not a practical paradigm for the United States or most democratic nations. Free societies typically lack the necessary level of centralized government control over the economic and informational domains to adequately synchronize them toward military-like objectives. Democracies are also subject to policy changes within representative governments that can affect the permanency of strategic ends across different administrations. Additionally, a cultural resistance against employing strategic deception and a preference for a philosophical delineation between states of peace and war preclude most Western states from setting the requisite conditions and effectively employing the necessary range of the forms of war needed to design or effectively execute a hybrid campaign.⁷⁹ Most importantly, hybrid warfare takes the means of positive interaction between liberal states; diplomatic, economic, and financial, and ‘weaponizes’ them to replace a commensurate military effort. To effectively employ hybrid warfare, not only would liberal states have to overcome the conflicts between declared values and enjoying the full range of kinetic options to include terrorism and criminal networks, but they would also have to deal with the dilemma of the use of instruments of peace to carry out acts of war when no state of war exists.

These restraining characteristics are not necessarily shared by offensive-realist, authoritarian regimes like Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Therefore, hybrid warfare can be a practical way for those states to manifest desired outcomes without relying solely on conventional military force, particularly when the capabilities of the conventional military are questionable. Before examining case studies for the conditions and forms of hybrid warfare, it is first necessary to survey Russia’s political-military organization to demonstrate that the general structure and predilections for hybrid warfare are in fact present.

⁷⁹ Kennan, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare*, 1. Kennan critiques the American preference by observing: “[The United States has] been handicapped however by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war, by a tendency to view war as a sort of sporting contest outside of all political context, by a national tendency to seek a political cure-all, and by a reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations...”

A. BACKGROUND

Anticipating an aggressor's cost/ benefit calculation is based on an understanding of the fundamental elements of the aggressor's political and military systems, how they interconnect, what the decision making processes are, and what presumptions they might hold about a defender's intentions, capabilities and resolve.⁸⁰ In order to understand how the Russian view regarding the use of coercion was shaped prior to the 2008 invasion of Georgia and continued to evolve through the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent operations in Donbas, it is important to examine how Russia's view of itself emerged following the breakup of the Soviet Union. As this perspective was not written on a clean slate of political-military thought, and as Russia has rapidly regressed towards authoritarianism, it is also necessary to visit some of the Soviet-era notions of strategy and offensive power-realism that have helped shape the contemporary Russian thinking that lays a foundation for hybrid warfare.

Hybrid warfare requires a high level of unified purpose and direction in order to be conceptually possible, let alone effective. It must be acknowledged that there is danger in oversimplifying the complex geo-political structure and mechanics of what remains the geographically largest country on Earth. Inarguably, there are powerful forces and competing interests exerting varying levels of influence both within the Russian government and from the parallel oligarchy that provides much of the functionality for the Russian system. There are also different political camps within the current Russian administration that hold divergent attitudes toward Russian foreign and domestic policy.⁸¹ These competing entities notwithstanding, what has emerged on the international stage is a deliberate manifestation of a fairly unitary worldview that has

⁸⁰ Paul Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*. Huth cautions against the "tendency of foreign policy leaders to view the actions of an adversary as a well-thought-out plan of action and strategy," 8. His caution serves to warn against interpreting all of the enemy's activities as a deliberate, calculated test of deterrence. Both sides are capable of lapses in judgement, holding false assumptions, or misinterpreting data. Despite Huth's warning, all of a hybrid warfare aggressor's actions must be scrutinized for signs of malice if there is to be any chance of discovering their intent before the end-game. If the premise of hybrid warfare is accepted- that the competitor state is a non-liberal, offensive-realist, who has demonstrated a willingness to subvert sovereignty with hybrid means- then his actions must be viewed as potential tests of deterrence through an objective-as-possible lens.

⁸¹ Graham Allison and Dimitri K. Simes, "Russia and America: Stumbling to War," *The National Interest* (April 20, 2015).

only become more firm in its nationalistic trajectory since December of 1999 when Boris Yeltsin handed the broken empire to a former KGB lieutenant-colonel, Vladimir Putin. Over the course of Putin's presidencies and the orchestrated 2008–2012 hiatus as prime minister, Vladimir Putin has methodically marginalized any real opposition to his agenda for Russia and shrunk his pool of advisors to a political spectrum that runs from pragmatic nationalists to hardline neo-imperialists.⁸² So, to a high degree, the current conflicts between Russia and Ukraine are manifestations of Putin's deliberate intent - long in the making- and not the unfortunate result of failed diplomacy, an accident of unexpected escalation or any other apologist's perspective. Through the manifestation of his "power vertical," Vladimir Putin has consolidated enough control over the various elements of Russian state power that he can selectively direct their employment. The singular "Russia" will therefore be used to describe the increasingly centralized, unitary dictates of the Putin regime.

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the re-emergence of a dormant debate within Russian society. The two principal groups were torn between Russia either adopting Western governmental and economic practices to become a fully integrated member of the Western world, or the strengthening of Russia's Eurasian identity so that Russia could regain its dominant position with respect to Asian influence. The Western, cosmopolitan, "Atlanticists" initially made up the reformative cabinets of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, but they were always strongly opposed by the "nationalist Eurasianists," to whom a post-Soviet doctrine included "a priority for the protection of Russians in other countries ... and an appreciable redistribution of [Russian] resources, options, ties, and interests in favor of Asia, or the eastern direction."⁸³ Among the nationalists, there was a further division between the Russian nationalists who "advocated a new Russia that encompassed all Russians and were closely tied to Orthodox Byelorussians and Ukrainians—but no one else" and the imperial nationalists who wanted to rebuild the

⁸² Allison and Simes, "Russia and America: Stumbling to War." Allison and Simes caution that Putin is "not the hardest of the hardliners" and is far more pragmatic than the "hotheads" who see overt military opportunism as the first and most proper course of action for advancing Russian power abroad.

⁸³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 143. See also: Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs Putin*, 2014, 10–16.

dominance and influence of the Czarist and Soviet Empires.⁸⁴ Throughout the '90s, the Russian elites and public remained divided at roughly 40 percent in favor of western reforms, 40 percent supporting the various nationalist and former communist initiatives, and the remaining 20 percent undecided between the two.⁸⁵

The 1991 Moscow coup attempt punctuated the end of the Soviet Empire, and the western world slowly exhaled as its long standing communist archrival fragmented along older ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious lines.⁸⁶ This fragmentation occurred with relatively little violence and without losing control of the Soviets' massive stockpile of nuclear weapons.⁸⁷ The political turmoil and economic collapse of the USSR meant that the Russians' ability to maintain a massive conventional military force was also no longer possible. Where there was once a monolithic unitary threat, there were now 15 independent states, each seemingly full of eager young democrats and entrepreneurs, poised to embrace Western values and readily enter the world market place.⁸⁸ This optimistic assessment and an American desire to enjoy the "peace dividend" helped conceal the true nature of the fragments of the empire.⁸⁹ While many young Russians did make an effort to embrace previously denied freedoms and opportunities, the surviving structure of Russian governance was a mixed network of sullen communist

⁸⁴ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 143.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁸⁶ The Soviet Union wasn't formally dissolved until four months after the coup when Mikhail Gorbachev resigned on Christmas Day, 1991, and the Supreme Soviet decreed the Soviet Union no longer existed on December 26th. The August coup attempt however, was the incontrovertible signal to the world that the ability of the central government to maintain control over the Union was over. While Lithuania and Georgia had already broken away from the Soviet Union before August, the coup was the watershed moment that touched off a cascade of declarations of independence from the Soviet Republics.

⁸⁷ The operative term is "relatively little" violence, given the vast military power of the Soviet Union. The breakup was punctuated with bloody outbreaks of inter-ethnic, localized violence, often involving ethnic cleansing as competing groups attempted to shape the future geo-political maps. These clashes were exacerbated by the Soviet state practices of forcibly moving ethnic groups within the boundaries of the USSR for a variety of political and economic reasons. When the Soviet Union broke apart, a number of these populations were suddenly stranded amongst larger groups that were nurturing ethno-nationalist sentiments, potentially hostile, and with no strong state power to prevent friction.

⁸⁸ Of the 15 former Soviet states, 12 would form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The three Baltic States- Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia- did not.

⁸⁹ For a brief summary of some of the optimistic assessments of Russia's setting aside of imperial aspirations to join the Western order, see: Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 239–241.

apparatchiks, angry at their loss of power and determined to retain some control over the shaping of the new Russian Federation, and an opportunistic *nouveaux-riches* oligarchy who had emerged as the winners during the often corrupt transition from state-owned to privatized business.⁹⁰

The 12 Former-Soviet States that would form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were of course not equal with regard to national power regardless of the wording of the CIS charter.⁹¹ The Russian Federation was the geographically, economically, and militarily largest of the members and the Russians demanded a correspondingly high degree of control over the policies and relationships of CIS members with the outside world. This dominion would later be challenged when the former Soviet Republics of Georgia and Ukraine both began making significant moves toward European economic integration and potential NATO membership.⁹² Unfortunately, in the early 1990s the West was determined to see Russia in the most optimistic of lights and certain concessions were made to Russian regional dominance that cemented Russia's ability to manipulate and coerce its lesser partners for the next two decades. The most notable of these concessions is the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which saw Ukraine voluntarily surrender the third largest nuclear weapons stockpile in the world to Russian control in exchange for guarantees of territorial sovereignty from Russian, the United States, and the UK.⁹³

⁹⁰ Not all state owned businesses or Communist Party assets were privatized. Many were transferred from Soviet books to Russian Federation control. One of Vladimir Putin's first political positions in Moscow was as deputy chief of the government body assigned with overseeing the transition of Soviet State property to the Russian Federation and the private sector. See: Shevtsova, 2005, 26–29.

⁹¹ "Charter Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States." (Minsk, Belarus: CIS, January 22, 1993). The exact wording from Section 1, Article 1 of the Charter is: "The Commonwealth is based on the foundations of the equality of all of its members. The member states are independent and equal subjects of international law."

⁹² Ukraine was a founding member of the CIS, but never fully joined the organization over disagreements with Russia regarding Russia's central control over member states' economic and defense policies. Georgia was a full member of the CIS until the 2008 war with Russia, after which Georgia formally withdrew its membership.

⁹³ "Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, 1994." (Budapest: UN, December 5, 1994), <http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/budapest-memorandums-security-assurances-1994/p32484>.

When the Moscow putsch demonstrated the degree to which Soviet central power had been reduced, an avalanche of declarations of sovereignty ran through the Soviet Union resulting in numerous new “republics,” autonomous districts, and a declaration of independence from Russia by Chechnya.⁹⁴ The non-Russian republics that broke from the Soviet Union did so primarily along national boundary lines that preceded the formation of the Soviet Union, with little accounting for the demographic shifts that occurred during the Soviet era. At the time of the fragmenting of the USSR, as many as 25 million ethnic Russians lived outside the borders of the Russian Federation, resulting in a population that did not necessarily regard the new “national” borders as immutable based on their ethnic association with Mother Russia.⁹⁵ Yeltsin was of course aware of this sentiment and may have intentionally undermined the permanent resolution of a number of border issues in order to leave the door open for future incorporation of these areas into the Russian Federation once the challenges to state-power in Moscow had been resolved.⁹⁶

In the first years of the post-Soviet era, Russia sought to maintain a high level of influence over a number of breakaway Soviet Republics, while simultaneously dealing with the fractured national political trajectories of different players within the Kremlin. Russian Army units stationed in the breakaway regions often became involved on the side of one faction or another for a host of reasons including ethnicity, political ideology, or religious identity. The army often assumed positions reflexively that ran counter to the wishes of the leadership in Moscow, such as the army’s support for pro-communist factions during the Tajikistan civil war while President Yeltsin was attempting to distance the country from residual elements of the communist party.⁹⁷ Similarly, the actions of the Russian 14th Army in the Transdnistria/ Moldova conflict demonstrated that the

⁹⁴ Thomas Graham, “Fragmentation of Russia,” *Russia after the Fall*, ed. Andrew C. Kuchins (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), 43.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁷ Dimitri K. Simes, *After the Collapse: Russia Seeks its Place as a Great Power* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 211.

Russian central government lacked complete control over its forces. The army acted on its own initiative, and created Russian foreign policy with little steering from Moscow.⁹⁸

In February 1993, Boris Yeltsin declared an official policy for Russia to have a determinative role, sanctioned by the UN, as the “guarantor of peace and stability in the former regions of the USSR” based on Russia’s special relationship with its neighbors.⁹⁹ As U.S. and Western militaries of the 1990s developed new theories for military involvement in operations other than war, specifically “peacekeeping,” the Russians seized on the term, if not the conceptual practice.¹⁰⁰ Russia used the idea of “peacekeeping” and its’ trappings of international legitimacy through international (CIS) resolutions and conflict arbitration decisions, but with a vastly different interpretation of what the role of those “peacekeeping” forces was. Russia became the sole arbiter for peacekeeping in the post-Soviet space, a role the international community seemed willing to accept at face value but which really belied Russia’s intent to maintain regional dominance.¹⁰¹ While UN-mandated peacekeepers were notoriously ‘neutral’ and frequently stood by as genocide occurred in Rwanda, Somalia, and Bosnia, Russian peacekeepers were just as often party to the conflicts. Russian peacekeepers were habitually involved in backing a particular side or outcome with weapons or direct participation, and predictably moved these conflicts toward whatever outcome resulted in

⁹⁸ Jeremy R. Azrael and Emil A. Payin, eds., *U.S. and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the use of Force*, (RAND Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, 1996), 57–58.

⁹⁹ Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia’s Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy toward Russia* (Boston, MA: John F. Kennedy School Of Government, Harvard University, 1994), 1. Not only did Yeltsin declare Russian primacy for peacekeeping efforts in the post-Soviet space, his foreign minister secured a mandate from the UN to that affect, along with UN funding. This may have made sense from the perspective of Russia becoming a liberal, Western state, but in reality it ended up shutting out other peace-brokers and observers, allowing Russia to secure its strategic objectives through active support to various belligerent parties and through direct military action.

¹⁰⁰ The idea of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) was similarly interpreted differently by COLs Liang and Xiangsui in *Unrestricted Warfare*. The Chinese were disappointed to see an American insistence on limiting the notion to the generally non-kinetic role of the military in times of crisis, instead of exploring the interpretation of the “non-military methods of waging war.” Similarly, Liang and Xiangsui note how close the idea of full-dimensional operations in U.S. Army doctrine (TRADOC Pamphlet 525–5) had come to their concept of supra-domain combinations but failed to realize its potential due to conventional constraints on thinking about the role of the military and the nature of war. See: Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (36–37, 161–164).

¹⁰¹ Kevin Fedarko, “In Russia’s Shadow,” *TIME Magazine*, October 11, 1993. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,979366,00.html>.

a greater degree of political control over the space for Moscow; to include the instigation of new conflicts or the prolonging of violence to create the pretext for greater Russian involvement at a time of the Kremlin's choosing.

After Yeltsin demanded the absolute right to determine and enforce any peace agreements between belligerents within the former territory of the USSR, Russia secured its dominance in the affairs of its "near-abroad" and minimized the level of external actors who might attempt to shape the outcome of any of these local conflicts.¹⁰² The power of the different semi-autonomous Russian districts within the Federation, particularly Tatarstan and Chechnya, led to different arrangements for governance and taxation between the central Russian government and other regions, resulting in an emerging sense of resentment for the central government from many of the less influential districts.¹⁰³ Yeltsin finally dissolved the ineffectual Federal Congress in 1994 and pressured Tatarstan to sign a treaty that acknowledged it was an inseparable part of Russia proper.¹⁰⁴ With ethnically motivated genocide unfolding throughout the early 1990s in Africa and the former Yugoslavia, it was of only passing concern in the West when the Russians determined that the independence of any of the Russian Federation's organic districts or provinces represented an existential threat. Russia needed to bring the first region to rebel back into line quickly, and with a certain level of violence as a lesson to any other independence-minded region. The test of this resolve would come from the small, mostly Muslim province of Chechnya.

When the Chechens declared independence from the Russian Federation in 1994, the hollowed-out shell of the Red Army invaded. What should have been a significant

¹⁰² Zbigniew Brzezinski, Paige Sullivan and Center for Strategic International Studies, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States : Documents, Data, and Analysis* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 145. See also: Hill, 1994, 1.

¹⁰³ Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 44. See also the Russian Federal Constitution. The Russian Federation is the 85 "Federal Subjects" - republics, oblasts, federal cities, and ethnic *okrugs* - that comprise Russia proper. As opposed to the non-Russian Republics who broke away from the USSR in 1991, the Federal Subjects are considered part of Russia, and the attempted breakaway of an autonomous republic like Chechnya threatened the existence of Russia as an entity. The Russian Federal constitution was amended in April 2014 to reflect the inclusion of the Republic of Crimea and the Federal City of Sevastopol. See: Constitution of the Russian Federation (Russian), Article 65, 19, 21: <http://pravo.gov.ru:8080/Document/View/0001201404110001?index=18&rangeSize=1>

¹⁰⁴ Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 45.

mismatch favoring superior Russian numbers was marked by a series of conventional defeats and bitter partisan warfare that were all too reminiscent of the Russians' disastrous campaign in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵ During the First Chechen War, the Russian governing elites began to grasp the problems that attrition-oriented forces encounter when facing "relational-maneuver" forces.¹⁰⁶ The Russian army was still structured and equipped to fight the war it thought it wanted to fight, where divisions of tanks and mechanized infantry would envelop lesser numbers of similar NATO forces on the European plain, and not the battlefield of rocky mountain passes and tangled city blocks where an adaptable "local" enemy consolidated, fought, and fluidly dispersed among the population. The First Chechen War (1994–1996) ended with a Russian declared "ceasefire" in 1996, which was in reality a humiliating defeat that exposed the weak state of the woefully underfunded and mismanaged Russian Army.¹⁰⁷

To combat the growing independence movements in other Russian districts, Boris Yeltsin reestablished central authority through the nationalist block of his cabinet and through the appointment and dismissal of a succession of politically powerful prime ministers before settling on his new Presidential Chief of Staff, the former KGB operative

¹⁰⁵ Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10. Arreguín-Toft gives an advantage to a force that refuses to fight the type of battle that the more powerful army wants to fight. Guerrilla warfare against a conventionally oriented invader historically favors the guerrilla. Symmetrical approaches to war traditionally favor the larger force. Understanding how the Chechens were able to resist the Russians for so long was lost on the Georgians during the 2008 war. The small Georgian Army decided to meet Russian tanks and artillery symmetrically with Georgian tanks and artillery, and the result became a simple math problem where the larger Russian forces crushed their numerically inferior, qualitatively similar opponents. See also: Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Parameters* XIII, no.4 (Carlisle Barracks, PA; U.S. Army War College, 1983).

¹⁰⁷ Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 50.

Vladimir Putin.¹⁰⁸ Moscow's desire to reassert central authority was aided by a series of apartment bombings in several major Russian cities, which pushed public sentiment toward both strong, nationalistic leadership and deliberate retaliation.¹⁰⁹ As a result of these attacks, Russian troops were soon back in Chechnya for the Second Chechen War (1999–2009) to regain Russia's physical control of the territory and then to conduct an extended “anti-terrorist” campaign against the Muslim separatists. The Second Chechen War was vociferously promoted as a matter of Russian state survival by the then largely unknown Vladimir Putin, then serving as Yeltsin's appointed acting Russian Prime Minister. Putin would ride the Russian nationalist sentiment of the Unity Party to an electoral affirmation of his popularity and the Russian Presidency in May of 2000.¹¹⁰

One of Putin's first acts upon assuming the presidency from Yeltsin was to cement his relationship with the Russian military by traveling to visit the Russian troops fighting in Chechnya.¹¹¹ Putin also took immediate steps to centralize his authority over the Federation by removing the federal governors' immunity from criminal prosecution, clamping down on the free press, and asserting federal control over several of the more independent-minded oligarchs.¹¹² Putin filled a number of top government

¹⁰⁸ Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 47–54. See also: Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, 2005. It is interesting to note that Putin was not a Kremlin insider during this entire time. He was a mid-level officer in the KGB in East Germany when the Berlin Wall fell. He left the intelligence service to work as a mid-level bureaucrat in Saint Petersburg and then Moscow, charged with transitioning Soviet State and Communist Party property over to the New Russian Federation or to privatized control. Yeltsin found Putin to be a problem solver and an uncompromising nationalist and brought him into his administration to head the KGB's reincarnation, the FSB. After a short period getting the FSB in order, Yeltsin made Putin his Chief of Staff. Yeltsin later appointed Putin as a Deputy Prime Minister for one day, before installing him as the acting Prime Minister in 1999. While this would all later be “legitimized” with a vote, the act of appointing a successor is much more ideologically in line with the actions of a monarch than any democratic institution, and speaks to the perception that Yeltsin and his protégé held of the position of “president.” Shevtsova describes Yeltsin's search for an appropriate heir as Machiavellian in its systematic exposure and removal of powerful potential rivals who did not share Yeltsin's ideology, including Boris Nemtsov and Victor Chernomyrdin (Shevtsova, 2005, 26–29).

¹⁰⁹ Lilia F. Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 38. There is still widespread speculation regarding the involvement of the FSB and GRU in the apartment bombings as an orchestrated “false-flag” meant to rally nationalist sentiment and give Yeltsin the pretext he needed to readdress the Chechen situation.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68–76.

¹¹¹ Tribune News Service, “Putin Visits Chechnya Near Eve of Vote, War's 6-Month Anniversary,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 2000. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-03-21/news/0003210199_1_southern-mountains-chechnya-acting-president-vladimir-putin.

¹¹² Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 55.

administrative positions with the *siloviki*, his trusted friends and allies, many of whom shared a similar background in the military and intelligence services.¹¹³ Putin also resurrected nationalist symbols of the pre-communist era to forge a new Russian identity including the Russian tri-color, the Tsarist double-headed eagle, and the national anthem of the USSR with revised, nationalist lyrics, while simultaneously promoting the Army's status as a symbol of Russian identity.¹¹⁴ Despite a heightened sense of nationalism, and promises to increase military spending, the Russian Army had been practically untrained from 1992 to 2000 and the force that was fighting in Chechnya at the turn of the millennium was a shadow of the Red Army's former Cold War strength.¹¹⁵

The Russians again employed a high level of conventional military force in Chechnya, often targeted randomly at civilians, but the conclusion to the Second Chechen War was eventually reached through aligning with and supporting a Chechen warlord, Akhmad Kadyrov.¹¹⁶ Russia gave Kadyrov, and later his son Ramzan Kadyrov, a relatively free hand in the local administration of the state and Kadyrov in turn acknowledged Chechen subordination and loyalty to the Russian Federation.¹¹⁷ Russia's exhausting efforts to subdue a small rebellious province through conventional military force undoubtedly enhanced the perceived value of pursuing hybrid warfare in order to set conditions that would necessitate only brief military confrontation in the pursuit of strategic objectives in the near abroad. The lessons learned in Chechnya were: 1) that Russia could act with relative impunity in the former Soviet space as long as the international community was left with an excuse for inaction, 2) certain elements of the

¹¹³ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, 86. *Siloviki* means "person of force" and is a name used to refer to Russian politicians and bureaucrats with backgrounds in the military or security services.

¹¹⁴ Graham, *Fragmentation of Russia*, 55.

¹¹⁵ Dale R. Herspring, ed., *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 187.

¹¹⁶ Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (February 12, 2009), 331–362. Lyall's study is focused on the correlation between indiscriminate artillery shelling of Chechen villages by Russian forces and corresponding levels of local insurgent activity. This compelling research is interesting even without the links to Chechen activity as it demonstrates the Russian's widespread use of artillery against civilians regardless of enemy military presence.

¹¹⁷ Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 195–196.

target population would support Russian intervention and governance as an alternative to local ethnic subjugation and endemic corruption, 3) “contract soldiers” could overcome the operational shortcomings of conscript forces while insulating the government from immediate culpability for war crimes, 4) local conflicts could be frozen and reignited on a timeline that favored Moscow’s ultimate designs for the residual political situation, and 5) that blunt application of conventional force alone was a costly way to chase uncertain outcomes.¹¹⁸ The value of the Chechen experience in shaping Russian hybrid warfare can be seen in the importance Russia began to place on controlling the narrative of emerging conflicts, the emphasis Russia places on intervention as a defensive measure to protect an oppressed minority, the attributional buffer gained by using “separatist” proxy forces, and the use of negotiations and resolutions to preserve Russian initiative in shaping a conflict’s culminating point.

Western desires to perceive Russian activities such as peacekeeping as comparable to similar Western activities were an unfortunate byproduct of the assumption that Russia had adopted a liberal perspective of its role in the post-Soviet world.¹¹⁹ However, the cognitive trap of mistaking Russian practices for what the West would have preferred to see was not unique to the post-Soviet era. “It is commonplace that society tends to project its own values when it attempts to study another society or culture. This value projection (or mirror-imaging) has resulted in western analysis that frequently fails to determine the purpose and direction of Soviet military programs because we have too often confused Soviet military concerns with our own.”¹²⁰ The

¹¹⁸ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 194. “Contract soldiers” in this instance refers to a private military contractor/ mercenary arrangement. For a description of these entities see Van Herpen, 190. This usage may be confused with the use of “contract soldiers” after the Russian military restructuring where it is often meant to refer to uniformed soldiers who were serving a contractual enlistment as opposed to conscripts. Russia continues to make use of private military contractors as well, which serves to help mask the presence of members of the standing army in other conflicts and gives Russia some level of deniability. While Russia was fighting the 2nd Chechen War, they were undoubtedly aware of the mass graves being exhumed in Bosnia and the subsequent World Court indictments for war crimes. The refrain in Chechnya became “no corpse, no problem.” Disappeared Chechens, including women and children, were frequently killed and the bodies were then blown up with explosives to reduce the need for mass burials and to hide any evidence that might link the dead to a specific killer.

¹¹⁹ Georg Sørensen, “After the Security Dilemma: The Challenges of Insecurity in Weak States and the Dilemma of Liberal Values,” *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 3 (September 01, 2007): 357–378.

¹²⁰ John J. Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1981), 1.

problems of mirror-imaging include not only military intentions, but the cultural values that shape and drive military doctrine and conduct. “Western confidence that the Soviets are actually interested in ‘stabilizing’ world relations is an illusion. The word ... is simply not in their dictionary, nor ... anywhere in their doctrine.”¹²¹ In the post-Soviet space, the ability to use diplomacy to formulate favorable ceasefires and treaties and to ensure terms favorable to Russian interests, as well as enforced by Russian troops, was a highly effective way of securing agreements that bound the international community’s ability to interfere with Russian regional dominance. The West wanted to see diplomatic efforts as the dominant framework for interstate relations, and not as the expedient means of consolidating Russia’s dominion of the near-abroad.

B. THE SOVIET ROOTS OF MODERN RUSSIAN THINKING

At [the] bottom of [the] Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs is a traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. Originally, this was insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in a neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area. But this latter type of insecurity was one which afflicted rather Russian rulers than Russian people; for Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form, fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation, unable to stand comparison or contact with political systems of Western countries. For this reason they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned truth about [the] world without or if foreigners learned truth about [the] world within. And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.¹²²

Vladimir Putin might have been an unexpected choice to rise from relative obscurity to take the reins of the Russian Federation, but as an officer in the KGB he was still a product of Soviet-era military, political, and intelligence schooling. Putin’s early systematic education in Soviet political-military philosophy certainly shaped some degree

¹²¹ Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*, ix.

¹²² George F. Kennan, *The Long Telegram* (Washington, DC: Secretary of State, 1946), part 2.

of his worldview long before fortune led him to the Russian presidency. It is therefore necessary to briefly examine this wide body of thought to identify the nascent formulations of hybrid warfare. Contrary to popular Western beliefs that tend to reflexively categorize Soviet military ability as either nuclear or as massed divisions of conventional troops, the Soviets conceptualized the employment of hybrid political and military means as a pragmatic tool for changing a relative power relationship. These thoughts were not just the Marxist-Leninist dogma for exporting popular revolution, but were also strategic formulations for employment of the entire Red Army.

Long before Putin assumed the mantle of state power, his Soviet-era training likely created a clear understanding that the first objective of Soviet strategy had to be to ensure the survival of the Soviet regime. Outside the rhetoric of the spread of global communism, the Soviet Union had the very specific goal of “advancing the power of the USSR in whatever ways [were] most expedient so long as the survival of the Soviet power itself [was] not endangered.”¹²³ Because of this focus, the Soviets never saw the deliberate provocation of war with the West as being in their interest because they rationally concluded that the Soviet Union, and consequently the Soviet regime, would not survive. So they sought to “pursue a policy of peaceful expansion of their influence and power.”¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the Soviets remained “alert to exploit counter-deterrence of Western strength when they considered the risks to be low, especially in cases where aggression [could] be indirect.”¹²⁵ These tests of deterrent resolve were designed in a way that Soviet military force was assembled and prepared to exploit a lack of opposition without having to commit to the action until the final moment, but also with off-ramps for escalation, which enabled the Soviets to back down without losing face if the response

¹²³ Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 2.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 3. Garthoff used the Soviets’ official policy rhetoric of “peaceful.” In this context it does not discount limited warfare, only large-scale conventional or nuclear confrontation. The Soviets were unapologetic offensive-realists, so the dichotomy between “peaceful” and “expansion of power and influence” was only apparent when the target resisted the subordinate role in this relationship and overt force had to be used to gain compliance.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3.

was significant. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia provides an illustration of one such test.

In 1968, the Soviets were worried about a move toward liberalization in Prague and needed to reverse the action lest it be successful and repeated in other Eastern Bloc countries. Moscow ordered large scale military exercises near the Czech border to serve as a coercive warning for the government in Prague to back down, and to see what NATO's response would be. If Prague fell back in line, or if NATO proved to be more resolute than expected, the Soviets could demobilize at the end of the exercise without having crossed any red-lines and being forced to either fight or back down and lose face. When neither happened, Brezhnev ordered the Red Army to invade, confident that the reform movement could be crushed quickly and that NATO would not actively counter the move.¹²⁶ The Soviets calculated that the United States was too preoccupied with the buildup of conventional forces in Vietnam and that U.S. practices of extended-deterrence were not likely to include nuclear weapons if there was not an existential threat to the United States itself. In other words, limited war would incur limited response. Testing deterrence, while maintaining options through the use of mobilizations for exercises, has become a hallmark of Russian military practice. For mobilizations to be effective in coercion, and to preserve the decision to commit force until the last possible moment, large exercises work best when the target has contiguous borders to the aggressor state, and the forces can be mobilized and massed without leaving the aggressor's territory. As this practice sought to hide the specific aims of Soviet strategy, strategic deception is a cornerstone of this approach to international relations.

Because hybrid warfare seeks to undermine an adversary's ability to defend its sovereignty without the complete commitment of military force, the aggressor must obscure his strategic intent from the victim (and the victim's sponsors) for as long as

¹²⁶ U.S. State Department, Office of the Historian, "Milestones: 1961–1968: Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968."

possible.¹²⁷ This makes deception a fundamental aspect of a hybrid warfare strategy. “There existed a Leninist principle and practice in which deception was embedded systemically in the relationships of the Party to all external entities and even in the relationship of the leadership to the membership.”¹²⁸ The Soviets employed strategic deception against the West throughout the Cold War, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the modern Russian state is comfortable continuing this practice.¹²⁹ The communist view of deception was quite simply that the end did in fact justify the means.¹³⁰ “The Marxist-Leninist system, with its belief in inevitable and predictable dialectical change, accepted that anything that promoted that change was desirable if not essential, and that deception was therefore a legitimate tool in peace and war.”¹³¹ Effective strategic deception as part of a hybrid warfare campaign seeks to create ambiguity regarding the aggressor’s intent so that when decisive action is taken the initiative is gained through surprise. This deception may take a range of forms from carefully crafted disinformation meant to create doubt about objectives, to masking dramatic changes in the nature of the conflict behind significant international events or crises that compete for news coverage and audience attention.

Despite being the victim of the surprise German invasion of Russia during Operation Barbarossa in 1941, Stalin was somewhat dismissive of the role of surprise as having any more than a “transitory, temporary significance” in the outcome of a war.¹³² The post-World War II generation of Soviet military theorists, however, would conceptualize that “in certain cases surprise attack with the mass use of new weapons can

¹²⁷ In some recent instances, such as Georgia, the target state can be aware of the general intent of the aggressor, but either remains incapable of articulating its severity without sounding alarmist, or underestimates the severity of the threat due to an expectation of support by a strong sponsor state. For their part, the sponsor state also has to interpret the true nature of the threat and then take the necessary steps to demonstrate the resolve of the sponsor’s extended deterrence. For additional insight into the considerations of the intent of a nation to actually conduct extended deterrence and support an ally under attack, see also: Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, 5.

¹²⁸ Walter Jajko, “Deception: Appeal for Acceptance; Discourse on Doctrine; Preface to Planning,” *Comparative Strategy* 21 (2002): 351.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹³⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*.

¹³¹ Jon Latimer, *Deception in War* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010), 3.

¹³² Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War*, 61.

provoke the quick collapse of the state whose capability for resistance is low as a consequence of the basic failures of its social and economic structure, and also of an unfavorable geographic location.”¹³³ This description should not be interpreted solely as a case for nuclear first-strike or to Marxist rantings about the decay of western civilization. Instead it provides several critical components for conceptualizing a hybrid approach to warfare. The hybrid combination of diplomatic, economic, and cyber weapons to augment military forms of war can be categorized as “new weapons,” and the effectiveness of their employment is greatly enhanced if the victim does not immediately recognize their employment as acts of war. Obscuring the goals or the existence of hybrid warfare is possible by employing the instruments of peace as weapons and the sub-state instruments of violence to create kinetic-like effects. Masking the existence of a hybrid campaign can also be facilitated by attacking the target state’s means of resistance in depth to overwhelm the victim’s ability to interpret the nature of the attacks and prepare an appropriate defense.

One of the leading Soviet thinkers in the lead-up to World War II, General Mikhail Tukhachevskii, theorized that “Deep Battle,” the simultaneous employment of mobile strike forces through an enemy’s operational depth, could overwhelm the enemy’s ability to process information and would paralyze the entire defense, leading to its defeat in detail.¹³⁴ Tukhachevskii was anticipating a clash between large conventional forces, but his principles have value in formulating the Russian roots of hybrid warfare. Simultaneity is essential to ensure the enemy is not able to respond and organize a defense.¹³⁵ Simultaneity requires a high degree of control to achieve synergy, and hybrid

¹³³ Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War*, 64–65, Garthoff attributes this quote to Russian LTG S. Shatilov, “A Great and Noble Theme,” *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, May 28, 1955.

¹³⁴ Richard E. Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii* (London; Washington: Brassey’s Defence, 1987), 33–49. Tukhachevskii, Marshal of the Soviet Union, was executed during Stalin’s purge in 1937 before he could complete his thoughts on deep battle, and deep operational theory, but his general premise of achieving a breach and then using any means of new technology (long range artillery, airborne forces, light bombers and tanks) to push completely through the enemy’s depth to simultaneously attack headquarters, supply systems, reserve forces, and artillery supporting the front, eventually became a central idea of Russian land battle doctrine. The notion that Tukhachevskii’s Deep Battle served to overwhelm the enemy’s information processing ability and decision functions was presented by Dr. David Kilcullen during a lecture at the Naval Postgraduate School in September 2015.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

warfare similarly demands that its component forms are focused to maximize the strategic effect without forcing an unanticipated escalation and surrendering the initiative by the aggressor. Deep battle is dependent on the “cooperation of arms or all-arms battle” and each arm is interchangeable if it can accomplish the same result.¹³⁶ Hybrid warfare expands the idea of the interchangeability of the military instruments of war to include all of the available means for isolating and attacking an enemy’s ability to resist, and if properly synchronized it overwhelms the defender’s ability to process and respond to what is happening. Where Tukhachevskii’s Deep Battle envisioned purely military forms of war attacking military targets across an adversary’s operational depth, hybrid warfare conceptualizes the employment of military and non-military forms of war to attack select political, informational, military and economic targets across an adversary’s *strategic* depth to similarly overwhelm his ability to process what is happening and respond effectively. The timing of a hybrid campaign would have to consider the target state’s unilateral capacity to resist aggression and the efforts needed to undermine that capability by exploiting social fissures like ethnic or religious differences within the target population. It would also consider undermining economic stability to shake confidence in the target regime and cut the raw materials needed for war. The hybrid campaign can only be helped if the target region also happens to be a geographic space that is somewhat isolated or difficult for the target government to physically project power. If access to the space can be limited by difficult terrain or an ethnic minority population, then the target state will have a difficult time in asserting its authoritative role and countering the aggressor’s efforts.

Another long-standing Soviet theory of warfare is the idea of non-linear warfare. Where Deep Battle still envisioned a front, “non-linear warfare” assumed that tactical nuclear weapons would be frequently employed to create large gaps in defensive lines that could be exploited by follow-on ground forces.¹³⁷ Nuclear strikes were later

¹³⁶ Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 36–37.

¹³⁷ Lester W. Grau, *Soviet Non-Linear Combat: The Challenge of the 90s* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 1990), 2. See also: Nathan C. Leites, *Soviet Style in War*, United States Dept. of Defense, Director of Net Assessment and Rand Corporation, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1982), for an assessment of the Soviet values of surprise and offensive action.

replaced doctrinally with precision conventional munitions which similarly made a fixed, linear front obsolete, promoting the concept of Soviet battalion tactical groups who would use maneuver and tempo to conduct “meeting engagements” with enemy forces.¹³⁸ The Russians continue to prefer the term “non-linear warfare” to describe their theory and actions that have become collectively referred to in the West as “hybrid warfare.” Despite Russian preferences, geographic non-linearity does not necessarily apply to hybrid warfare. When an aggressor pursues a hybrid campaign, he does so with an understanding of the geopolitical line, the recognized international border that if crossed with large conventional forces will change the nature of the conflict. While there may be no active front within the contested area, the international border serves as a defensive line that restricts maneuver. A much more appropriate use of non-linearity in hybrid warfare is in the understanding of time. Temporal non-linearity means that hybrid warfare does not occur from left-to-right in a phased progression. The hybrid warfare aggressor may introduce certain levels of violence during a supposed time of peace, and may pursue diplomacy to freeze a conflict if the initiative is being lost. Temporal non-linearity unfortunately undermines most efforts to model hybrid warfare in a concise manner. Political non-linearity speaks to the nature of the targets of a hybrid campaign. The target state’s sovereignty may be attacked away from a contested area, in the capital, in the international economy, or in the information domain.

The military forms of war were also not the only means that the Soviets envisioned as being capable of achieving the objectives of war. “Soviet *military* doctrine [held] necessary the coordinated use of all forms of military power, as expedient. This means flexibility in selection among military means, as well as selecting between military and political means.”¹³⁹ The intent of this reminder was mainly an admonition against an overreliance on nuclear weapons, as a deeply “ingrained Communist precept to avoid gambling on any single or “easy” means to victory.”¹⁴⁰ By looking outside of the purely military means, the Soviets seized on the notion of using soft power, primarily economic,

¹³⁸ Grau, *Soviet Non-Linear Combat: The Challenge of the 90s*, 2–3.

¹³⁹ Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War*, 11. (Emphasis added).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

to help achieve what would have been traditionally military objectives. The belief in political warfare was central to communist philosophy. As George Kennan, the eminent American expert on the early Soviet Union observed, “Lenin so synthesized the teachings of Marx and Clausewitz that the Kremlin’s conduct of political warfare has become the most refined and effective of any in history.”¹⁴¹ Soviet military thought was highly critical of the Western “bourgeois” approach to military theory as too narrowly focused on military art in isolation from the “economic and morale potentialities of the country.”¹⁴² While the communists’ claims of perfecting a calculus that included these factors guided by Marxist principles might seem somewhat absurd over half a century later, it is telling that Soviet military science included a deep connection between the military battlefield, the economy and the force of human will as the “permanently operating factors” with which both sides must contend during war.¹⁴³

Even during the massive conventional clashes of entire army groups during the First World War, certain Russian military theorists were postulating a strategy of indirect warfare as a way of defeating an enemy through attrition. During the 1920s, early Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin authored *Strategy*, “the most important work [written] on the subject in the Soviet Union until the 1960s.”¹⁴⁴ Unlike the competing *strategy of destruction* which promoted a traditional vision of warfare that espoused the focus of mass and fires at the decisive point, Svechin’s *strategy of attrition* allowed for “any number of intermediate military, political, and economic goals.”¹⁴⁵ By expanding the objectives of warfare beyond the destruction of military forces to include political and economic targets, Svechin created a conceptual framework for undermining a target state’s sources of strength *before* the introduction of force. The means Svechin envisioned for his gradual attrition of enemy power would be shaped by the “path of least resistance, gradually accumulating political, economic, and military advantages, which

¹⁴¹ Kennan, *The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare*.

¹⁴² Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War*, 28.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 129.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 129.

would enable it eventually to deliver the final ‘knockout’ blow.”¹⁴⁶ Despite charges of being too defensive minded, Svechin’s attrition strategy demonstrated “Leninist pragmatism” through its “advocacy of the maximum flexibility in the pursuit of unchanging ends.”¹⁴⁷ This strategic end-state, envisioned as a zero-sum contest that would produce a clear winner and a loser, served to focus all of the elements of national power in the manner that preserves those instruments of power to the greatest extent possible, particularly the military which becomes a finishing effort to an already well developed political battlefield. The melding of political, economic, and military means to achieve strategic ends demonstrates an early theoretical formulation of the economy of force value of hybrid warfare.

The synchronized efforts of diplomatic, informational, and economic attacks are easiest to control when they can be directed with the same authority that a head of state uses to employ his military. When Putin presented a series of draft anti-monopoly and judicial restructuring laws to the Duma in early 2001, he was initially hailed as a reformer. However, detailed examination of these laws reveal a consistent movement toward consolidating power under the President’s office; whatever power was taken away from the judiciary or the oligarchs was simply transferred to the chief executive.¹⁴⁸ Similar moves were made in the economic sector as well. On the tail end of these “reforms,” Putin removed the head of the Russian energy giant, Gazprom, and installed a loyalist who would put the company’s massive economic resources under Putin’s control.¹⁴⁹

In 1979, John Dziak argued that the long standing idea of Soviet “defensiveness” as the notion of the Soviets being solely concerned with surviving and resulting from their long history of foreign invasion, was indeed a myth.¹⁵⁰ This myth was promulgated by Westerners who wanted to view the United States as the real aggressor and to those

¹⁴⁶ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940*, 130.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁴⁸ Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia*, 189.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 188.

¹⁵⁰ Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*, vii from the forward by Gerald L. Siebel.

who wanted to reduce military spending in order to prevent an arms race that would likely lead to war. Beliefs in Soviet benevolence were based entirely on Western perceptions of the international order, and not on the Soviets' realist view of themselves. "In Soviet doctrine, war and politics are the same thing. They are not Clausewitz's 'other means,' but two names of a single concept."¹⁵¹ This Russian view of the spectrum of conflict is a requisite perception for hybrid warfare as it facilitates the conceptualization of achieving "military" victories well in advance of the outbreak of conventional warfare. "Soviet military doctrine and strategy are, first and foremost, offensive."¹⁵² Defensiveness was based on a perceived weakness in the existing balance of power, and all efforts were focused on carefully changing that dynamic in order to retain the initiative for the Soviets. In the Soviet era, "communist ideology and purely power-political considerations place the criterion of calculated risk, cost, and gain at the foundation of any strategic initiative."¹⁵³ This offensive-realist perspective and a willingness to employ violence and violate a target state's sovereignty during a time of "peace" remain fundamental attributes for the practitioner of hybrid warfare.

C. CONTEMPORARY PUTIN

What is most striking and most innovative about Mr. Putin's program is not its unabashed expansionist intent: after all, military rulers have pointed their swords at neighbors since Old Testament days. Rather, it is the seriousness with which he has attempted to coordinate activity in a broad range of seemingly separate spheres so as to provide maximal tactical support for the realization of his national dream.¹⁵⁴

By 1994, the Marxist principles of international class struggle had been exchanged in the Russian ruling elite's lexicon with policies espousing Russian nationalist interests in the near-abroad.¹⁵⁵ By replacing "communism" with

¹⁵¹ Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*, viii.

¹⁵² Joseph D. Douglass, *Conventional War and Escalation: The Soviet View* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1981), 52.

¹⁵³ Garthoff, *The Soviet Image of Future War*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 2014), 9.

¹⁵⁵ Brzezinski, Sullivan and Center for Strategic International Studies, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, 144–146.

“nationalism” or “Russian identity,” the Russians may have lessened their potential appeal to a global audience, but they had strengthened their ties to the regional population whose support they must have to protect the integrity of the Russian state. The existence of this population in the near-abroad provides a necessary element for a narrative of victimization, establishment of political and irregular “separatists,” and as an eventual pretext for Russian intervention.

Putin is a pragmatist and the standard risk-cost-benefit analysis remains a central factor in Russian calculus of the feasibility of strategic objectives. “These are not Middle Eastern zealots throwing caution to the winds, but managers fully alive to options, alternative plans, and escape hatches. Soviet warfighting is based on advantage, timing, and finding and exploiting enemy weaknesses, not just bulling ahead.”¹⁵⁶ Unlike Yeltsin, who would rush headlong into a political fray, when Putin encounters an obstacle, he prefers to “retreat and wait” to see what options the situation might surface.¹⁵⁷ “Putin is not a long-term planner. He lives in the here and now, just as he did in the KGB.”¹⁵⁸ While this tendency led to early claims that he was indecisive, when he did see an opportunity to break through an obstacle, such as the resistance to central authority by the seven regional Russian governors, Putin’s actions were carefully calculated and always aimed at strengthening the central authority of the state.¹⁵⁹

Vladimir Putin’s philosophy of the strength of the Russian State rests on three concepts: Orthodoxy; the power vertical; and sovereign democracy.¹⁶⁰ “Defender of the Orthodox Faith” is a Tsarist-era notion that intertwined the official status of Russian leadership with the legitimizing mandate of the Orthodox Church, which was always a state-funded, state-controlled institution. After the communist period, where all religions were in general disfavor, Putin has again interwoven the role of Russian leadership with the mantle of the Church’s champion as a cornerstone of identity for his new-Russia.

¹⁵⁶ Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice*, ix.

¹⁵⁷ Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia*.

¹⁵⁸ Herspring, *Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 186.

¹⁵⁹ Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia*, 89–94.

¹⁶⁰ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 57.

Putin's so-called "power vertical" signifies a return to the authoritarian, centrally controlled governing style that is much more closely related to the old Soviet or Imperial systems than it is to the European democracies.¹⁶¹ Oligarchs who accumulate too much wealth and resist Putin's control are investigated for some impropriety before their companies and fortunes are seized and they are imprisoned. Those who accept the power-vertical are allowed to continue to benefit from their positions. "Sovereign democracy" is the Russian counter to Western liberal democracy. Sovereign democracy discards "universal" democratic concepts such as fair elections and acceptance of changes in power, and replaces them with the notion that the sovereign state is the guarantor of fairness of its electoral processes, free from international interference.¹⁶² Russian elections are deemed as 'fair as they need to be' in order that the stability of the state is not threatened by the rise of different political entities.

The three ideological pillars of Orthodoxy, the "power vertical" and sovereign democracy, support the conceptualization and implementation of hybrid warfare. As the defender of the Orthodox Church, Putin provides himself with a mandate to extend protection not just to ethnic Russians but to all Orthodox Christians regardless of international borders. This can serve as a moral justification for violating sovereignty in a time of supposed peace, and it can also serve to rally support for Russia if Orthodox Christians make up a portion of the target population. Orthodoxy also provides a replacement for the adhesive functions that used to be a characteristic of communism; serving as the ideological glue that held the Soviet Empire together. Orthodoxy may even be a superior choice because it does not have to deliver in the material world.¹⁶³ Hunger, repression, and endemic corruption can and did undermine confidence in the communist system. Orthodoxy requires only faith and an association of the practices of that faith

¹⁶¹ Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right* (UK: Arktos Media Ltd, 2014), 103.

¹⁶² Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 57.

¹⁶³ While Orthodoxy might be a superior unifying agent it lacks appeal beyond the practitioners of the faith. As there are large populations of Muslims and other minority faiths within the bounds of the Russian Federation, an overemphasis on Orthodox Christianity and Russian identity will inevitably lead to increased tension and conflict both within the borders of the Federation and with non-Orthodox neighbor states.

with Russian identity. The centralization of authority over the functions of the state provides Putin with the ability to marshal the elements of national power toward specific strategic goals. Sovereign democracy also serves two important functions by largely insulating Putin from real democratic opposition to his policies, and by preventing a new administration with divergent strategic objectives from rising to power and derailing an embryonic hybrid campaign.

The Putin regime may have taken steps to insulate the Russian internal political process from external influence, but this does not mean that they also intend to withdraw Russia from the international body politic. On the contrary, Russian membership on the UN Security Council is critical to Russia's sense of global influence. The UN Security Council membership gives Russia what it perceives as its rightful seat at the central table of world affairs, and because Russia already has the seat, they do not need to make any concessions to "lesser powers" in order to gain membership, as they would have to in order to join the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹⁶⁴ The emphasis on legitimism is a "key principle of Putin's leadership."¹⁶⁵ Putin insisted that he would abide by the constitution of Russia regarding term limits, and when he vacated office in 2008 he was true to his word and the letter of the law, even as he undermined the intent of the law and retained the executive power while serving as the Prime Minister. Russia uses its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) veto power as an instrument of leverage that exploits the power-liberal principles of the international community, but it sets aside these principles when they interfere with its power-realist preferences. Russia recognizes its military inferiority to the United States and relies on its UNSC seat and on its nuclear arsenal as its twin pillars of foreign security.¹⁶⁶ Russia

¹⁶⁴ Hanna Smith, "Domestic Influences on Russian Foreign Policy: Status, Interests, and Resentment," in *Russia and its Near Neighbours: Identity, Interests and Foreign Policy*, eds. Maria R. Friere and Roger E. Kanet (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 56–57.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Sakwa, "Political Leadership," in *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, eds. Stephen K. Wegren and Dale R. Herspring, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 29.

¹⁶⁶ Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina V. Pallin, eds., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, (Stockholm, Sweden: FOIR, 2013), 78.

is also quick to shape its challenges to fit with international sentiment as a way of keeping the world out of Russia's "domestic" business.

Prior to the attacks in the United States on September 11th, 2001, Russia had conflicted views of its role in the post-Cold War world. Russia wanted to be seen as a player in world events, a peer that the international community must consult in order to secure a true consensus. Economic struggles throughout the 1990s, multiple small conflicts in the post-Soviet space, and disagreements with the West over issues like confronting the Milosevic regime in Serbia, kept the Russians from completely integrating into European affairs when such a move might have been a possibility. When George Bush unilaterally declared in 2001 that the nuclear arms treaties of the Cold War were outdated remnants of an animosity that had ceased to exist and that Russia and the United States would pursue a cooperative relationship, many Russian Atlanticist-liberals were pleased, but the Russian Eurasianist-conservative power establishment was fundamentally shaken.¹⁶⁷ Washington shifted its focus to other parts of the world and Russia was largely dismissed for its decreased centrality on the international stage. The conclusion taken from this situation by Russian power elites was that if Russia wanted to be treated with respect and as a peer by the United States, it could only do so by appearing dangerous.¹⁶⁸

For a brief period of time however, Russia was able to create the appearance of a convergence between Russian internal conflicts and international sentiment. Vladimir Putin immediately recognized the political implications of the American declaration of War on Terror immediately after September 11th.¹⁶⁹ Putin was among the first international leaders to call President Bush and offer support. He had already branded the Chechen separatists as terrorists linked to a growing Islamist threat in Afghanistan and

¹⁶⁷ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, 198.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁶⁹ Herspring, *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 197. Herspring may be a little generous in his assessment of Putin's genuine desire for a solid relationship with the US. Whether or not Putin realized the War on Terror as an opportunity to truly build a new Russian-United States dynamic, he understood instinctively that the global attitude was about to become much more permissive for ruthlessly pursuing Islamic militants, and his Chechnya problem could certainly be framed to fit this emerging narrative.

was quick to demonstrate Russia's existing efforts in Chechnya as commensurate with the broad tide of world anti-terror sentiment following the attacks in the United States.¹⁷⁰ The result was that Russian operations against Chechnya were in some ways equated with and could be narrated as supportive of the international war against Al Qaeda, and a common perception among many Western analysts that American and Russian relations had turned a corner now that the two states had a common enemy.

Framing conflicts in a manner that minimized international resistance demonstrates the importance Putin places on dominating the information domain in order to control the narrative. In many of their "peacekeeping operations" Russian forces were often accused of using excessive force which undermined their ability to sustain legitimate international support for their efforts. For example, the Russians learned that the limited tactical value of bombing a rebel Chechen village might be totally reversed by press reports of civilian casualties or losses of Russian soldiers. Bombing the village and then dominating the media reporting to downplay civilian casualties or to attribute the bombing to the rebels on the other hand was a win-win, even when the claims for rebel responsibility were based on implausible "facts." As the Internet and speed of global connectivity began to catch on during this period, the Russians learned to not just disrupt the dissidents' use of these platforms to communicate, but to also saturate these systems with Russian propaganda. These messages would have some unifying themes such as Russia's defense of Russian people and values, and the unprovoked aggression attributed to Russia's opponent, but they would also perform a masking function by generating a white-noise sea of conspiracy theories, baseless claims, and exaggerated actions meant to make any true accounts difficult to find and to provide excuses for appeasement-minded international organizations in lieu of having to take definitive action. Through the uncontested saturation of the entire spectrum of media, Putin is able to manufacture boogymen by playing to Russian sentiment, such as the repeated association of Ukraine with Nazi-Germany, and to invent historical foundations that support his world view, regardless of the actual facts. "The main difference between propaganda in the USSR and the new Russia...is that in Soviet times the concept of truth was important. Even if

¹⁷⁰ Smith, *Domestic Influences on Russian Foreign Policy: Status, Interests, and Resentment*, 51.

they were lying they took care to prove what they were doing was ‘the truth.’ Now no one even tries proving the ‘truth.’ You can just say anything. Create realities.”¹⁷¹

A cornerstone of Putin’s contemporary world view is the notion of New-Russia, a construct that envisions a future state that redraws existing geopolitical boundaries to encompass populations that are believed to be ethnically or historically more aligned with Moscow than with a foreign state. Putin has forged this New-Russian identity into a supra-nationalist rallying point.¹⁷² His methodology for promoting this identity has been to craft a narrative of a strong Russian state through the symbols of Russian history, not least of which is the resurrection of Novorossiia (New Russia), a short lived political entity making up the southeastern portion of modern Ukraine. Where those symbols or the historical narrative have needed a push, he has simply ordered the history to be rewritten.¹⁷³ A significant political sentiment within the dominant “United Russia” party is the belief that Russia’s frontiers are “not eternal” and that the borders should be redrawn to encompass all Russians, even if this risks Russia’s “relatively peaceful life.”¹⁷⁴ This sentiment, from Putin’s strongest supporters, indicates the willingness to use violence against Russia’s neighbors in order to reshape the physical boundaries of Russia without regard for the sovereign status of those states.

Only gradually did Putin’s single-minded focus on restoring what he defined as the geographical integrity and honor of the Russian state become evident. And it took yet more time for the world at large to understand how far he was willing to go in pursuit of that end. The inability or reluctance of western and other policymakers, intelligence services, and independent foreign affairs experts to grasp this dedication

¹⁷¹ Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, “The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money,” *The Interpreter* (2014), 9. This quote is attributed to former Putin election campaign consultant and Kremlin political insider Gleb Pavlovsky.

¹⁷² Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 116–117. Van Herpen describes poll data that indicates some degree of Russian ultranationalist sentiment is prevalent in a majority of the Russian population, and patriotism has a central place in Putin’s ideology. The term “supra-national” is used here because the new-Russian identity is very deliberately not limited to the Russians who currently live within the borders of the Russian Federation.

¹⁷³ “Putin Orders to Amplify Textbooks with Information about Crimea’s Role,” *Crimean News Agency (QHA)*, June 03, 2014. Putin ordered changes to history textbooks in Russia (and Crimea) that “amplify” the role of Crimea as a part of the Russian empire. See also: Van Herpen, 2014, 118; and Hedenskog, 2013, 77.

¹⁷⁴ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 117–118.

on Putin's part ranks as an analytic failure of the first rank. Meanwhile, Putin seized the initiative in his military attack on Georgia in 2008, in his multi-dimensional but non-military assault on Kyrgyzstan in 2010, and then in his invasion of Ukraine and seizure of Crimea and other territories in 2014.¹⁷⁵

Vladimir Putin has resurrected the Soviet perspectives of offensive-realism, strategic deception, and belief in political tools as weapons to shape a framework for a new-Russian foreign policy in the near-abroad.

D. RUSSIAN GRAND STRATEGIC GOALS

What cannot be so easily deduced [are] the formal and institutional process by which the main opportunities of Russian strategy are identified, and the process of decision-making that sets them in motion. Closely related to this are the organizations and organizational processes that define, organize, coordinate, and set in motion the various tactical steps in each concrete situation. Here, too, the reason is obvious: these are matters of the utmost secrecy. Indeed, the entire mechanism by which strategy is translated into tactics in Putin's Russia is protected by the same shield of secrecy that surrounded high tactics in the U.S.S.R. The one thing that can be asserted beyond doubt is that the process is highly centralized in Putin's own office and that he has been involved in every stage of that process. Putin, a product of the late Soviet KGB, simply assumes that this [is] all a natural and key element of his personal leadership. To compromise tactical secrecy would be to compromise the entire enterprise.¹⁷⁶

Despite this secrecy and the extent that the Russians employ deception to help mask their efforts, three general strategic themes can be deduced from their actual practices: 1) Ensure the continuity of the central government, 2) Ensure that Russia maintains its dominant position in the former Soviet space, and 3) Restore Russia's status as a major power on the global stage. As was true during the Soviet-era, Putin's immediate concern is with ensuring the continuity and stability of his government. "Protecting the regime" sounds much more pejorative, although it is nonetheless accurate. Putin believes in a strong central state and he sees competing internal political mechanisms as a deficiency in that strength. Any measures taken to crack down on

¹⁷⁵ Starr and Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Starr and Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, 9–10.

dissent are therefore justified as defending the central authority of the state and subsequently as necessary to the defense of the nation.

Putin views Russia's preeminence in the former Soviet space, or the near-abroad, as a Russian version of Manifest Destiny.¹⁷⁷ His secondary general objective is to ensure that the states of the former USSR remain politically, economically and militarily aligned with (and subordinate to) Moscow, regardless of the desires of the affected populations. "Events between the invasion of Georgia and the armed seizure of Ukrainian territory in 2014 forced policy makers and international affairs specialists worldwide to acknowledge the possibility that the Russian Republic under Vladimir Putin has reorganized its entire foreign and domestic policy in order to pursue a single objective, namely, the establishment of a new kind of union comprised of former Soviet republics and headed by Russia itself."¹⁷⁸ Whether the debate between Russian Nationalists and Imperial Nationalists regarding a future Russia whose boundaries have been redrawn around ethnic Russian populations or whose influence includes the complete domination of former Soviet neighbors is ever settled, the result of either disregards the sovereign desires of the affected countries. "Today the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea confirm that the Putin regime openly believes that its' system can only survive if Russia is an empire, a situation that *ab initio* puts the sovereignty and integrity of other CIS members at risk."¹⁷⁹

The first two strategic themes are related to the extent that Putin fears a stable, liberal democracy on Russia's border will debunk his assertions regarding Eurasians' need for authoritarian governments and serve as a model for domestic opposition in Moscow, and that any movement toward liberalism is the result of Western meddling in Russia's sphere of influence. The third theme is Russia's renewed position of importance on the world stage. Russia has been the seat of a powerful empire, twice. Its preferred

¹⁷⁷ Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1935). Manifest Destiny was the mid-19th Century American belief in a divine mandate for territorial expansion of the United States, which served as the moral justification for western settlement and wars with native tribes and Mexico.

¹⁷⁸ Starr and Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, 6.

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Blank, *The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project*, eds. S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 2014), 18.

position is to be a principle player on the international stage once again, but so far this desire has not been realizable due to Russia's diminished economic and diplomatic capabilities. Russia will likely continue to try to promote its importance through its seat on the UN Security Council and by conducting just enough saber rattling to remind the world that it still has the world's largest stock pile of nuclear weapons.

Putin's strategy hinges on maintaining internal legitimacy, advancing a narrative of Russian greatness, manipulating nationalism, and protecting sources of revenue. He seizes opportunities to improve his position by controlling the media and the wealth of the elite class. Additionally, he maintains government control of large sectors of the Russian economy and industry, while engaging in energy politics abroad to advance its national interests. Finally, Putin is determined to keep former Soviet bloc countries oriented politically and economically toward Russia. In this, he espouses distinctly anti-Western rhetoric, casting NATO and the United States as Russian adversaries.¹⁸⁰

E. RUSSIAN ELEMENTS OF POWER

"Russian development rests on a few pillars—a strong state, strong armed forces, and a strong Orthodox church."¹⁸¹ The strengthening of these pillars has led to the redefining of what it means to be Russian and is interwoven with the moral authority of organized religion. Putin's shifting of power to his central control (the power vertical) and taking steps to minimize political opposition are his methods for shoring up the strength of the state. His final and most difficult challenge is to rebuild a strong Russian military. The conventional land forces remain the non-nuclear backbone of Russian power, and a general understanding of their disposition is helpful for envisioning the regular practices of mobilization, exercise, and redeployment that define the Russian system. Cyber-warfare is also an emerging Russian area of emphasis that has different levels of employment within and completely independent of larger campaigns.

¹⁸⁰ Douglas Mastriano and Derrek O'Malley, eds., *Project 1704: A U.S. Army War College Analysis of Russian Strategy in Eastern Europe, an Appropriate U.S. Response and the Implications for U.S. Land Power* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2014), 5.

¹⁸¹ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 76. This study analyzed Russia's ability to seize and hold territory as well as to conduct stand-off warfare (engaging enemy targets at distances of 300+ kilometers – beyond the doctrinal operational depth of a Russian Army Group's operational ability to seize and hold territory) through 2020.

The 2008 Georgian War was another reality check for Russian leadership regarding how badly the Russian Army had degraded since the end of the Soviet Union. Unlike the first venture in Chechnya, the Russians were able to claim a clear victory in Georgia. However, despite spending the better part of eight years preparing for an inevitable invasion, and employing a concerted hybrid warfare effort against the Georgians, the conventional invasion revealed significant shortcomings in the Russian conventional warfighting functions, and success was largely due only to superior numbers and a symmetrical response from the Georgian side. With this assessment in hand, Vladimir Putin and his proxy Dmitry Medvedev ordered the complete reorganization of the Russian Army in 2008.¹⁸² The goals for the restructure included one million men in uniform, an increased role for non-commissioned officers, decreased reliance on conscription and a change from divisional to brigade maneuver structures.¹⁸³

Russia is divided into four Military Districts (MD)—Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern- (similar to a U.S. Geographic Combatant Command, but regionally focused from within Russian territory), each commanded by a Joint Strategic Commander (JSC).¹⁸⁴ The JSC has the responsibility for commanding his apportioned forces and mobilizing the reserves from within his MD, but he may receive strategic reinforcements from other MDs as the Ministry of Defense allocates resources.¹⁸⁵ The JSC has command over all joint forces within his MD except for strategic nuclear forces and airborne forces which fall directly under the Russian General Staff.¹⁸⁶ Overall manning of the Russian armed forces is chronically understrength. Average unit manning levels are between 40 and 60 percent, although units in the Southern MD (bordering the

¹⁸² Anne Applebaum, “Is Dmitry Medvedev Ready to Stand Up to Vladimir Putin?” *The Telegraph*, 14 April, 2011. Applebaum describes Medvedev’s appointment and subsequent election to the presidency as a farce that Putin used as a way to appear to be abiding by the constitutionally mandated limit of two consecutive terms, all while maintaining political control through his subsequent appointment as Prime Minister.

¹⁸³ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 38.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 18–24.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 24–25.

Caucasus, Black Sea and Ukraine) are generally closer to full strength, indicating where Moscow's assumption of future problems was focused in late 2012.¹⁸⁷

Russia relies on a system of reserve mobilization to work up to its full combat strength. For maintaining troop strength in the conduct of limited war, active units from outside of the committed MD are likely to be temporarily assigned to relieve the committed forces without having to force a complete, costly, mobilization. Russia's overall strength is divided among the MDs based on the perceived threat. The Western MD has three brigades on hand and can raise three more within one month and two more within six months to cover the Russian border from Finland to Belarus.¹⁸⁸ The Southern MD has responsibility for the Caucasus and Ukraine. It has five brigades on hand and can raise four more within a month, manned to 90 percent due to the perceived regional volatility and potential for flare-ups in the Caucasus.¹⁸⁹ The Central MD has two brigades on hand and can activate two more within one month and an additional two within six months.¹⁹⁰ The Eastern MD has three brigades on hand and can call up an additional three brigades in one month and four more brigades within six months.¹⁹¹

The Russian Ministry of Defense retains operational control of the airborne forces (VDV).¹⁹² There are four airborne divisions (two airborne, two air assault) and one independent airborne brigade.¹⁹³ The 45th Special Forces Regiment (the likely core of a newly formed Russian Special Operations Command) is also a part of the VDV as are air transport and helicopter units. Three divisions and one Brigade of VDV are available as

¹⁸⁷ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 38.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 52. It should be noted that Russia maintains prepositioned stockpiles for a number of the potentially activated units, but not all. Presumably a full mobilization would also include shifting to a wartime economy and quickly producing the requisite stock to outfit new units being brought on line. Short of a full mobilization, the MoD practices a delicate game of rotating active units to engaged Military Districts while preventing the perception of vulnerability along the frontier of the losing MD. Commitment to the defense of the frontier prevents the MoD from sending all active brigades to a single combat area at once.

¹⁹² Ibid., 30.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 30.

reinforcements all across Russia.¹⁹⁴ Half of a VDV division (one brigade) could be deployed anywhere in Russia within a week, another whole division within a month, and two more divisions within six months.¹⁹⁵ Russian VDV are “likely to play a key supporting role in limited wars, especially initially when the ability to be deployed comparatively swiftly would help in buying time for the mobilization and transport of reinforcements to the strategic direction in question.”¹⁹⁶

The Russians have four fleets: the Baltic Fleet based near Kaliningrad, the Northern Fleet based near Murmansk, the Black Sea Fleet based at Sevastopol, and the Pacific fleet based at Vladivostok.¹⁹⁷ The warm-water port at Sevastopol plays an important role in the Russian’s ability to project power in the Mediterranean and Middle East. The potential loss of this port due to an inhospitable government taking power in Kiev may have been a driving factor in Putin’s decision to annex Crimea in early 2014.

The Russians have also developed a renewed interest in the use of “soft power” and Vladimir Putin’s definition as “a set of tools and methods to achieve foreign policy goals without the use of weapons [but instead] through information and other levers of influence” confirms his emphasis is on the coercive effects of these instruments, despite his claims to the contrary.¹⁹⁸ Putin’s word choice here is highly indicative of a thought process that supports hybrid warfare. He is not using “soft power” in the sense of interstate attraction theorized by Joseph Nye.¹⁹⁹ Instead he begins with the objectives that would have once only been realizable through military means, and then reverse-engineers the achievement of those coercive ends with other instruments of national power. Putin then makes a case that these same instruments of soft power, particularly open information systems, are also “unfortunately, often...used to nurture and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public consciousness, [and] direct

¹⁹⁴ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 43–44.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 28. There is also a Caspian Sea flotilla that is confined to that land-locked body of water.

¹⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Russia and the Changing World,” *Moscow News*, February 27, 2012. <http://www.mn.ru/politics/20120227/312306749.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 23.

interference in the internal policies of sovereign States.”²⁰⁰ Putin’s case is fairly clear. These instruments are the tools of the state, and they must be controlled in order to protect the state.

The 1991 Gulf War was troubling for Russian military thinkers due to the devastating effect that coalition “technical warfare” had on Iraqi, Soviet-based communications and information infrastructure.²⁰¹ Predating the west’s “Revolution in Military Affairs” the Russians identified the possibility of information technologies being used as formidable weapons that would supplant the primacy of strike systems.²⁰² The Russians were also disconcerted to witness the complete cyber domination of their integrated anti-aircraft systems in Syria when Israeli fighters were unopposed during a devastating air raid that destroyed a joint Syrian-North Korean nuclear venture in 2007.²⁰³ Russia’s concept of information warfare differs from the West’s in that there is little delineation between wartime and peace, other than the specificity of the targets of the campaign. The Russians maintain different strategic, operational, and tactical focuses for information warfare.²⁰⁴ As an example of how the Russians conceptualize information warfare as both an economy of force, risk mitigation and force projection capability, Alexandr Burutin, the Russian Deputy Chief of Staff, claimed information warfare capabilities “do not require specialized manufacturing facilities and a complex infrastructure. A small group or even one expert can develop and carry out an act of destruction while not having to physically cross borders and expose human lives to risk.”²⁰⁵ The shortcoming of information warfare to achieve strategic objectives without

²⁰⁰ Putin, “Russia and the Changing World.”

²⁰¹ Roland Heickero, *Emerging Cyber Threats and Russian Views on Information Warfare and Information Operations*, (Stockholm, Sweden; FOIR, 2010), 15.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰³ Richard A. Clarke, *Cyber War: The Next Threat to National Security and what to do about It* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 1–9. The air raid on the Syrian Al Kibar facility during Operation Orchard in September 2007 was virtually uncontested due to the manipulation of the Syrian’s air defense network software to prevent the detection of the attacking aircraft.

²⁰⁴ Heickero, *Emerging Cyber Threats and Russian Views on Information Warfare and Information Operations*, 18.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

complimentary activities in the physical domain was demonstrated during the 2007 cyber-attacks on Tallinn.

In 2007, the Estonian government voted to move a monument to Russian soldiers in Tallinn. This decision was condemned by Moscow and for over a week, Estonian government and financial institutions were subjected to a wave of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, supposedly carried out by patriotic Russian hackers. There is overwhelming circumstantial evidence that these attacks were at least supported if not directly controlled by the Russian government, and they are indicative of the Russians' efforts to experiment with coercion of a foreign government's domestic policy through purely cyber means. The Estonian attack is unique in that the Russians were able to marshal the efforts of a number of criminal cyber enterprises and direct their collective efforts at a state target, while insulating official Russian institutions from culpability. Ultimately the "cyber-war" against Estonia failed to achieve the desired outcome as the Estonians moved the statue anyway.²⁰⁶ "Cyber power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through [the] use of the electronically interconnected resources of the cyber domain...These preferred outcomes can be within or outside of cyberspace."²⁰⁷ The Russians realized the need to combine cyber-attacks with other elements of power, as they demonstrated during the assault on Georgia the following year. Nevertheless, the Russians are continuing to experiment with the evolving possibilities of cyber warfare in isolated and coordinated hybrid warfare efforts. Armies are relatively easy to quantify, cyber is not. Cyber size and dependence may actually create vulnerabilities for the stronger or dominant actor.²⁰⁸ In normal power projection, "resources and mobility are costly. In the virtual world, physical distance is immaterial and an offensive can be almost cost free."²⁰⁹ Cyber power affects many other domains from war to commerce, so

²⁰⁶ Brandon Valeriano and Ryan C. Maness, "Paper Tiger Putin: The Failure of Russia's Anachronistic Antagonism," *Foreign Affairs*, April 30, 2015.

²⁰⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Cyber Power* (May, 2010): 3–4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

it is an increasingly important platform for attacks on those sectors as well a distribution vector for propaganda.²¹⁰

Following the 2008 military reorganization, Russian military doctrine has included an increased level of “importance [on] information warfare during the initial phase of a conflict to weaken the command and control ability of the opponent and in the form of an information campaign during the actual battle to create a positive view within the international community.”²¹¹ While the responsibility for controlling these operations likely lies with the FSB, the execution of attacks against Estonian government systems in 2007 and against the Georgian command and control infrastructure in 2008 (at the outset of the Russian invasion) were supposedly executed by small cells of Russian civilian “hacktivists” through a large bot-net of infected machines, with no conclusive ties to the Russian government. This privateer-like organization provides the Russian government with a degree of deniability while still enabling the pursuit of strategic objectives.²¹² “By using information warfare methods to attack an adversary’s centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities it is possible to win against an opponent, militarily as well as politically, at a low cost without necessarily occupying the territory of the enemy.”²¹³

Domestic Russian-dissident demonstrations against Putin’s regime in 2011–2012 caused the Russian leadership to develop a heightened sense of insecurity.²¹⁴ This anxiety enabled Putin to push through new laws in 2012 and 2014 curbing the freedom of speech and demonstration.²¹⁵ While these laws demonstrate the potential fragility of the Putin regime, they also put in place a high degree of control over the information spectrum that enables Moscow to conduct hybrid warfare.

²¹⁰ Nye, *Cyber Power*, 5.

²¹¹ Heickero, *Emerging Cyber Threats and Russian Views on Information Warfare and Information Operations*, 13.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹⁴ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 71.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Russia: Veto Law to Restrict Online Freedom* (HRW.org, 2014). See also Hedenskog and Pallin, 2013, 76. The Russian law requires the registration of blog sites with the central information bureau, prohibits anonymous postings, and specifies a number of other restrictions on free speech.

F. SUMMARY

Russia maintains the offensive-realist perspective of national power and believes it is entitled to a dominant role in its' near abroad. Russia continues to hold the Soviet-era perspective of there being no hard delineation between war and peace, which facilitates its employment of the full spectrum of national power, including certain levels of violence, as a means to assert its authority. Gone are the scores of standing Red Army divisions and the expectations of superiority through sheer numbers. Faced with this new reality, Russia necessarily has to look beyond the purely military forms of war to exploit those tools that can isolate and degrade traditionally military targets while minimizing the commitment and subsequent risk of the few brigades it does have. This modern evolution of Russian limited war draws from a long history of Russian military thinking which included the ideas of warfare not being confined to a fixed front but stretching through an adversary's strategic depth, the instruments of warfare being completely interchangeable so long as they can achieve a disruptive effect on the adversary's ability to process and respond to new information, and the notion of enduring attrition to wear down an adversary with other elements of national power in order to preserve the military for the decisive blow.

Russia also continues to employ widespread deception to create uncertainty on the part of its adversaries and to mask its true intentions for as long as possible. Putin values "soft-power" as a means to achieve hard effects, and his military continues to use mobilizations and exercises as a means of coercion and to preserve the decision to commit forces for as long as possible while he measures changes in the potential cost-benefit equation. Putin has formulated

A fresh approach to the tactics of union-building—[which] does not preclude a heavy reliance on military force. Indeed, the record to date suggests that it requires it. But Putin's important insight on tactics sees the military as but one of more than a dozen distinct spheres in which pressures and incentives can and must be brought to bear to achieve the desired end. These tactical tools are as diverse as energy, transport routes, training, credit and finance, support of kindred groups abroad, information

and propaganda, monetary policy, research, immigration policy, labor law, investments, and open-ended payments that are little more than bribes.²¹⁶

Putin is an authoritarian leader who has consolidated control over the diplomatic, informational and economic domains of Russian power while he has simultaneously worked to strengthen the Russian military. Most importantly, Putin has developed a unitary strategic framework that facilitates a hybridization of his means of political and military warfare as an efficient way to 1) ensure domestic stability by eliminating any real opposition, controlling the national narrative, and shifting the blame for domestic shortcomings to external actors; 2) promote Russia's regional dominance by forcing former Soviet states to accept political and military alignment with Moscow; and 3) demand international respect for a significant role in world affairs through its position on the UN security council and by creating doubt regarding the stability of the international order. While these strategic themes may at points be interrelated, specific strategic ends may satisfy one or more of these categories.

²¹⁶ Starr and Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, 8.

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IV. RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR, 2008

Apart from the novel use of coordinated cyber and physical attacks, there can be an unfortunate temptation to view the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 as a short, conventional conflict when examined from the time that Russian tanks crossed into Georgian territory on August 7th, 2008, and the signing of a ceasefire five days later on August 12th.²¹⁷ This perception, again, fits the Western preference for a clear delineation between peace and war, and that a state of peace, however tense or fragile, existed on August 6th. It also assumes the liberal viewpoint of international relations and the underlying belief that modern conflicts are simply the result of failed diplomacy and not the intentional violation of national sovereignty by an aggressor. Years later, there remains an open debate regarding when Russia actually decided to go to war with Georgia; an argument that can be attributed to the clash of liberal and realist perspectives. The liberal side of this debate claims that Putin made the decision in 2008 when the crisis had deteriorated beyond the possibility of reconciliation. The realists, on the other hand, believe that the 2008 war was merely the overt execution phase of a “Grand Plan” that had been conceived as early as 1999 and was marked in the intervening years with deliberate actions taken to undermine Georgia’s ability to defend against Russia’s annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Figure 2).²¹⁸ To analyze the Russo-Georgian War for evidence of a deliberate Russian effort at experimenting with hybrid warfare, the

²¹⁷ Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 5. The Russian-Georgian War has a number of names including “The Five-Day War” and the “War over South Ossetia.” Even the name of the conflict is part of the ongoing effort by Russians to frame the war in terms that support their narrative, and similarly on the part of the Georgians to paint their side of the conflict as purely defensive. The August 7th start date is also debated as part of a determined Russian effort to maintain a strategic narrative of being the victim of Georgian aggression. Coordinated Russian cyber-attacks of Georgian systems began two days before the “start” of the ground war, and the Russian invasion was only possible because the requisite troops had been mobilized and massed on the border well in advance of the shooting. Russian forces definitely passed through the Roki Tunnel into South Ossetia on August 7th to “reinforce peacekeeping forces.” The Georgian Army later shelled the road in front of this force to prevent them from seizing Tskhinvali. Russia continues to claim that this shelling was the opening hostile act and that the subsequent Russian offensive on August 8th was necessary to protect Russian peacekeepers and South Ossetian civilians.

²¹⁸ Andei Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 51.

latter view of Russian intentions provides the only logical explanation for Russian actions over the greater part of a decade prior to the summer of 2008.²¹⁹

Figure 2. Map of Georgia with Breakaway Regions Abkhazia (Green) and South Ossetia (Purple)



Created by “ChrisO” at UN Cartographic section and available in public domain at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/91/Georgia_high_detail_map.png.

Georgia has long served as the ethno-religious buffer between Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam. Following annexation from the Ottoman Turks by the Russian Empire in 1810, it has developed an integral frontier status within the psyche of Russia, despite the limited number of ethnic Russians who actually live there. Georgia has always been a patchwork of various ethnicities and religions, but for a brief period of time the dominance of the Russian Empire and the emergence of the Russian-led Union of Soviet

²¹⁹ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 207. Van Herpen divides this timeframe into three phases: a Russo Georgian Cold War lasting from December 2000- Spring 2008, a lukewarm war from the spring until August 2008, and the hot war from August 7th-August 12th 2008. Van Herpen also concludes that the conflict was a war of Putin’s choice and that the Russian violations of Georgian sovereignty were a continuous process aimed at realizing Russia’s strategic goals.

Socialist Republics resulted in a more prominent status for citizens with Russian identity; enough so that Georgia's most infamous native son, Iosif Dzhugashvili, would be known to history by his Russian-derived revolutionary pseudonym—Joseph Stalin.²²⁰ Despite the fact that 30 percent of the population of Georgia are people of ethnic groups other than Georgian, and that many of these groups enjoyed protected status under the Soviet system, all political parties voted unanimously for full independence from the emerging Russian Federation in October 1990.²²¹ At the same time that Georgia gained independence, minority enclaves with existing levels of autonomy, most notably South Ossetia, made subsequent moves to declare themselves independent republics or as republics that were still a part of the collapsing USSR. In the case of South Ossetia, Georgia responded by nullifying Ossetia's autonomous status, banning Ossetian separatist political organizations, and then employing the Georgian armed forces to force the region back under Tbilisi's control.²²²

From late 1990 until early 1992, Russia provided covert military aid to the South Ossetians until agreeing to allow the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor a freeze in the conflict.²²³ There are several factors that may have served to postpone Russian intervention at this time. While the First Gulf War was certainly the dominate international headline of the time and might have masked Russian activities in Georgia, Moscow had its hands full with the August 1991 putsch, as well as several active conflicts in former Soviet territories of Tajikistan and Moldova where locally based Soviet-turned-Russian forces were already party to the conflicts. Concurrently, Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia undermined his own credibility as

²²⁰ Robert Hatch McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1988), 6–25.

²²¹ Thomas Goltz, "The Paradox of Living in Paradise: Georgia's Descent into Chaos," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 16.

²²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 18. This marks one of the rare times that external observers were allowed to perform a monitoring function within the former Soviet space. Presumably this was permitted because of the turmoil in Moscow and Russia correctly assumed that the observers would actually help prevent the Georgians from ending the rebellion, essentially freezing the conflict until Russia was better positioned to manipulate it to a more desirable end.

a unitary leader almost immediately after Georgia declared independence and the Georgian political landscape devolved into a number of competing entities.²²⁴ In short, dealing with Georgia was something the Russians could put off until later, and the presence of OSCE monitors and Russian peacekeepers served to maintain the status quo until the Russians were in a better position to deal with their impetuous Georgian neighbors.

When the new Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, sponsored a national celebration in August of 1992 to mark Georgia's admission to the United Nations as an independent state, he invited the leadership of the restive Abkhazian region in order to promote greater Georgian unity. The Abkhazians initially accepted the offer, but then failed to arrive in Tbilisi for the ceremony due to strong pressure from Moscow, who subsequently began providing arms to a number of different Abkhazian militant groups.²²⁵ While Moscow might have had too many competing priorities to intervene in Georgia directly, the Russians had no intention of letting the newly independent Georgians resolve their internal dispute and coalesce into a strong, unitary entity. The August 1992 arming of Abkhazian militia and bandits by Russia arguably lacks the centralized strategic direction and cross-domain characteristics of hybrid warfare, however, the destabilizing effects of the ensuing clashes between Georgians and Abkhazians kept Georgia disaggregated until the Russians were prepared to intervene at a

²²⁴ Goltz, *The Paradox of Living in Paradise: Georgia's Descent into Chaos*, 19. Gamsakhurdia was elected with almost 86 percent of the vote, yet he lost popularity within months after making bizarre claims that Gorbachev had orchestrated the Moscow Putsch against himself as a kind of false flag operation and after implementing repressive measures against South Ossetia. When his own political party began to break apart and form opposition, the Russians likely decided to let those fractures run their course. The political situation in Tbilisi was occurring in the greater context of violent conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia (within the Russian Federation and therefore an immediate problem), Azerbaijan and Armenia, civil war in Tajikistan, and separatist violence in Moldova.

²²⁵ Ibid.

time of their choosing. Russia's post-Soviet political turmoil across the former empire initially left Moscow "reacting to events in Georgia rather than initiating them."²²⁶

The "Abkhaz War" of 1992–1993 was also marked by the appearance of Russian soldiers and military hardware, particularly aircraft, which would join an Abkhaz action against the Georgians and then disappear back into the Russian Federation. These incursions were vociferously denied by the Kremlin, even after the Georgians shot down several MIG 29s and recovered the pilots' bodies, complete with Russian military identification.²²⁷ Not only did the Russian's deny their involvement, but they went the extra step of claiming the Georgians were bombing Georgian civilians and painting Georgian aircraft with Russian markings. These accusations were repeated in the Russian media and mark a departure from former Soviet propaganda practices where some kernel of truth was expected to be at the core of a state-sponsored message.²²⁸ The far less sophisticated practice of flat denial and immediate counter accusation created just enough confusion regarding the facts of an action that no single event served to focus an international response to the Russian violation of Georgian sovereignty.

Through Yeltsin's policy of excluding external peacekeepers, Russia was able to promote Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence movements which would destabilize the fledgling Georgian government. As the conflicts flared up, Russia would then "intervene" to fashion ceasefires and interpose Russian troops between the rebels and Georgian forces. Russia was subsequently able to maintain its military presence on Georgian soil and could quickly destabilize the general situation as a means to slow

²²⁶ Thornike Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 28. While Russia armed the Abkhaz rebels and provided covert direct support against the Georgians, these actions were more indicative of the remnants of the Soviet Army acting in support of various factions in other post-Soviet conflicts. The Russian military had a long-standing relationship with Abkhazia, many Red Army officers have retirement homes along the Abkhaz/ Black Sea coast, and have a personal connection to the community. Moscow was too disorganized at the time of the Abkhaz War to set a plan for assimilating the region into motion, but the Russian Army instinctively knew that Georgia's consolidation of control over the area would place this region of geographic and sentimental value permanently under a foreign flag.

²²⁷ Goltz, *The Paradox of Living in Paradise: Georgia's Descent into Chaos*, 26.

²²⁸ Pomerantsev and Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, 9.

Georgia's breaking from Moscow's orbit and aligning politically or economically with the West.²²⁹

As a condition for "helping" end the Abkhaz War (that they had instigated and sustained) and supporting Shevardnadze against a breakaway Georgian movement, the Russians were able to maintain four military bases in Georgia and also secured the right to appoint the Georgian Ministers of Defense, Interior, and Security.²³⁰ From 1995 to 1999, Georgia endured Russian subjugation, but gradually began establishing ties with the United States and setting up parallel government structures to those that were dominated by the Russians.²³¹ Shevardnadze also obtained U.S. backing in establishing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline which would provide a means of bringing Central-Asian oil to European markets without transiting Russia, a development that infuriated Moscow.²³² The Russians were unable to directly counter the Georgian drift westward during this period as the Russian army was being significantly mired in Moscow's attempt to keep Georgia's neighbor, Chechnya, from breaking away from the Federation during the First Chechen War from 1994–1996. The First Chechen War was an important factor in shaping Russia's calculus of the cost of employing conventional force to assert its dominance in the post-Soviet space. The Chechen experience was a disaster for Moscow. Not only was the Russian Army significantly battered by the small, would-be independent state, but Russia also faced heavy criticism internationally for its indiscriminate engagement of civilians and numerous human rights abuses.

After the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the United States, Russia was quick to again read the winds of international fortune and to rebrand its operations in the former Soviet space from peacekeeping to "counter-terrorism," a narrative that was supported by the wave of apartment bombings in Russia two years earlier and the Beslan school

²²⁹ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 35.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35. This would become a major point of contention in the ensuing years. Georgia considered itself and was internationally recognized as a completely independent and sovereign state. Foreign (Russian) governmental appointment of the most powerful "Georgian" ministers and the coerced maintenance of foreign military forces not only humiliated Georgia but completely undermined the very concept of sovereignty.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²³² *Ibid.*, 39.

massacre in 2004. Russia regularly used the pretext of pursuing Chechen terrorists to bomb Georgian territory and to exceed peacekeeping force caps in South Ossetia, but this insistence on playing the terrorism card would backfire by drawing unwanted involvement in Georgia from the US. Georgia was pushed even further into the orbit of the West when Putin demanded that Russian soldiers be allowed to man the Georgian border with Chechnya at the outset of the Second Chechen War. By 2002, U.S. military aid under the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) comprised over 60 percent of Georgia's defense budget, while Russia was simultaneously preventing Georgian diaspora living in Russia from sending remittances to their families.²³³ The impetus for the GTEP program was a U.S. reaction to Russia's exaggerated claims of Al Qaeda affiliation with Chechen separatists and their supposed safe-haven in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. When Russia's own claims were used by the Georgians to request U.S. counter-terror assistance, the Russians were unable to justify opposition to the subsequent aid package.²³⁴

A. HYBRID WARFARE REQUISITE CONDITIONS

1. Russian Strategic Goals

While Russia treats its true strategic intentions as state secrets, the concept of sustaining or increasing relative regional military power paints a fairly clear picture of Russia's desired strategic end-state with regard to Georgia. "Russia's invasion of Georgia was not merely a response to that small country's seeming to thumb its nose at the Kremlin, but an important building block in Putin's much larger geopolitical edifice."²³⁵ Russia's ability to project power southwards through the Caucasus in the direction of Turkey and Iran is degraded by the extremely rugged Greater Caucasus Mountain Range that largely defines the Russian-Georgian border. "The main goal of the military operation in Georgia and the Black Sea was...to take irreversible control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The establishment of sizable Russian military bases in

²³³ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 41.

²³⁴ Ibid., 43.

²³⁵ Starr and Cornell, *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, 6.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as control over critical mountain crossings [would] significantly improved Russia's strategic military position in the Caucasus region."²³⁶ A permanent Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia provides Russia with a military capability that is free of the geographical choke points of the natural terrain.

Russia's strategic view regarding Georgia is primarily based on geography. Georgia lies on the transit corridor between the Central Asia and Europe and is situated on the land bridge between the Black and Caspian Seas. Georgia also shares a border with NATO member Turkey. Abkhazia makes up about half of Georgia's Black Sea Coast, a body of water over which Russia has always attempted to maintain a dominant position. Russia's strategic goals in Georgia can be categorized as those that further Russia's dominance over the former Soviet space and those that preempt external actors from attempting to challenge that dominion. Locally, Russia's aims include the age-old practice of controlling geographic territory and taking steps to protect the Russian monopoly on the transit of oil and gas between Central Asia and Europe. Russia wants to prevent a former Soviet state in the Caucasus from joining NATO, not just because of that state's location, but also because Russia wants to other states from entertaining a similar notion. "The main task of the Russian invasion was to bring about state failure and fully destroy the Georgian army and centralized police force. A failed Georgian state, torn apart by political rivalry and regional warlords, cannot ever become a NATO member and could be easier to control from Moscow."²³⁷

While the existential threat that NATO expansion might present to Russian sovereignty is either perceived as very real or at least as a very useful pretext by the Putin regime, the moves toward increasing authoritarianism and the crushing of Russian opposition movements demonstrate the Kremlin's very strong concern about the threat of Russian populist movements finding inspiration in a place where Putin had asserted they

²³⁶ Carolina V. Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russia's War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20:2 (2009): 403.

²³⁷ Pavel Felgenhauer, "After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 177.

were doomed to fail due to their alien “Western” nature.²³⁸ Putin’s regime has long viewed the so called “color revolutions,” particularly the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, as western plots to install western leaning regimes in the former Soviet space. Should these movements produce effective democratic governments, they might inspire similar movements in Moscow.²³⁹ Moscow therefore seeks to weaken the democratic institutions in Georgia so they don’t spread north and threaten Putin’s regime. A senior Russian official eventually disclosed the Russian strategic goals of the Georgian war as: “1) Establishing full Russian control over South Ossetia, 2) Assisting Abkhazia in gaining control over several Georgian villages to create a more desirable border, while expelling Georgian forces from the Kodori Gorge, 3) Permanently stationing Russian troops [in Georgia] on the buffer zone between Abkhazia and Georgia proper, 4) Humiliating the Georgian leadership, and 5) Preventing Georgia from ever becoming a NATO member.”²⁴⁰

In the years leading up to the 2008 invasion it was imperative for Russia to control the regular flare-ups of violence in order to preserve the Russian initiative for a military resolution. If there were to be an all-out effort by Georgia to crush the rebels when Russia was not expecting it, it might take months to activate and position the forces necessary for a response, a task whose difficulty would be compounded if Georgian forces were to control the Roki Tunnel and the Abkhaz rail chokepoints. Russia eventually appointed Russian officers to the leadership of both militias, a move that made all ensuing significant militia action a product of Russian direction. “It is undeniable that both parties—the Russian-Abkhazian-South Ossetian coalition, on the one hand, and Georgia on the other—took steps toward a military solution of the crisis, or, more correctly the crises. Nevertheless, it appears obvious that the initiative in most, if not all,

²³⁸ Svante E. Cornell, “The European Union: Eastern Partnership Vs. Eurasian Union,” in *Putin’s Grand Strategy: the Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, eds. S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (Washington, DC: The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2014), 186.

²³⁹ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 46. The 2005 “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan can also be included in this list, although it was somewhat less worrisome to Moscow due to the Central Asian nation’s physical remoteness from Europe.

²⁴⁰ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108.

of those steps lay with the Russian-Abkhazian-South Ossetian coalition.”²⁴¹ Controlling the initiative is critical to ensure the ultimate overt confrontation happens at a time of the aggressor’s deliberate choosing.

The peacekeeping operations and military exercises that Russian conducted in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and along the Russo-Georgian frontier also provided opportunities for Russia to develop the infrastructure that would ultimately support the conventional invasion. The Russian army was able to use the bases for these operations to preposition large numbers of troops and heavy weapons on Georgian soil, and they were able to build support facilities for future operations at the same time. The Russians build a field surgical hospital in Abkhazia that they then turned over to the Abkhazian’s as a “humanitarian” gesture. They stockpiled massive amounts of weapons and ammunition in the forward area as part of their “peacekeeping” footprint. Most tellingly, in April and June 2008, the Russian Army repaired the railway between the Southern Military Zone and Abkhazia.²⁴² Russian forces, particularly armor, are heavily reliant on rail transportation to deploy throughout the Federation following a mobilization.²⁴³ The Railroad Troops finished the repairs on the Abkhazia rail line on July 30th, 2008, a week before the invasion.

After establishing the local strategic goal of dismembering the Georgian state and placing the two breakaway regions under Russian control, Russia needed to cultivate a degree of receptivity toward this outcome amongst the Abkhaz and South Ossetian populations. Russia promoted a narrative of Georgian abuse of minorities to promote anti-Georgia sentiment, while selectively undermining and removing all reconciliatory parties who were willing to bury the hatchet with Georgia.²⁴⁴ Hybrid warfare is greatly facilitated through the promotion of a separatist movement within the target state’s population. A degree of indigenous local support helps legitimize the aggressor’s efforts,

²⁴¹ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 49.

²⁴² *Abkhazia-Path to War*, Globalsecurity.org (Nov 2011), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/abkhazia-1.htm>

²⁴³ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 44.

²⁴⁴ Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 73.

and to mask the aggressor's true intentions, but the actual goals of such a movement are subordinate to the aggressor state's designs.

2. Masking the Dynamic Change to the Status Quo

As the level of violence escalated in Russia's hybrid warfare against Georgia, the Russians relied on other events in the world to help mask the signs of an impending conventional invasion. Apart from the use of existing "peacekeeping" forces and exercises to attempt to hide the buildup of troops and arms in and near Georgia, the Russians did little to disguise the fact that an all-out invasion was about to take place. The United States was seemingly caught by surprise when the shooting commenced on August 7th, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had just visited Tbilisi to discuss the deteriorating situation, and the Bush administration had repeatedly warned the Georgians against responding to Russian provocations.²⁴⁵ If anything, Russia calculated that it could get away with an invasion because of other events that were taking place on the world stage. By the summer of 2008, the surge in Iraq was appearing to bear fruit, but it had required the use of five additional brigades and the tour extension of thousands of troops already in the combat zone, all amid continuing cries from American lawmakers that the Iraq War was lost and that the United States was no longer able to deal with a crisis elsewhere in the world.²⁴⁶ Georgia's most capable fighting force, the 1st Infantry Division, was also serving in Iraq and subsequently not available to defend against a Russian attack. Moscow was also acutely aware of the impending U.S. Presidential election and the growing American sentiment against military involvement overseas. The potential election of the first black American President was focusing most American media coverage on domestic politics. The media coverage that was not on the pending U.S. election was simultaneously captivated by the implosion of the U.S. economy. In the summer of 2008, the financial market was in freefall as the sub-prime mortgage schemes were collapsing across the banking sector. What little international media coverage could

²⁴⁵ Stephen Blank, "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 118–119.

²⁴⁶ Joel Roberts, "Senator Reid on Iraq: 'This War is Lost,'" *CBS News*, April 20, 2007, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/senator-reid-on-iraq-this-war-is-lost/>.

find a moment on this stage was almost completely devoted to the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, whose opening ceremonies on August 8th coincided with the Russian invasion. With a pacifism-inclined Europe, an over-extended American military, and a U.S. public that was largely oblivious to events in the Caucasus, Putin wagered correctly that there would be little international appetite to directly counter his military incursion into Georgia. The Russians would attempt to further reduce international back lash by controlling the narrative of the conflict and assuming the position of the aggrieved victim responding to Georgian aggression.

B. ABOVE-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: INFORMATION DOMINANCE, DIPLOMATIC WARFARE

Not only was Russia heavily involved in undermining the democratic processes in Georgia prior to the 2008 invasion, but the Russians used the subsequent political resolution of the conflict as a means to demonstrate the impotence of the European Union and to exploit fissures between the Europeans and the Americans, further alienating not just Georgia but other western leaning countries as well. The E.U., under French leadership, was very determined to take the lead role in negotiating the ceasefire that marked the end of the Russian offensive in Georgia, yet failed to take determinative action when the Russians violated the cease-fire.²⁴⁷ Russia demonstrated the value of its positions on both the U.N. Security Council where it could veto any determined international effort to counter its dominant position in the Caucasus. Conflicts that were “frozen” tended to lose any determined European initiatives for a final resolution, resulting in the conditions at the time of the freezing becoming the new status quo.²⁴⁸

Russia and its Abkhaz and South Ossetian proxies made numerous unsubstantiated claims about Georgian oppression of ethnic minorities, military buildup and plans for Georgian military action against the two breakaway provinces. These claims included the supposed massing of Georgian forces in the Abkhazian Kodori Gorge, the stockpiling of large numbers of arms and materiel imported from Turkey

²⁴⁷ Blank, *From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis before the 2008 War*, 112.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

(NATO), and the alleged conduct of unannounced large-scale military rehearsals and exercises.²⁴⁹ Russia flew approximately fifty Russian reporters to Tskhinvali just days before the August 7th invasion.²⁵⁰ The presence of these reporters and the lack of Western war correspondents enabled Putin to control the narrative that was disseminated through Western news media outlets, and subsequently shape the opinions of the Western public and policy makers. The Russian narrative of Georgian aggression against South Ossetians, who were conveniently now Russian citizens due to the liberal issuance of Russian passports in the years prior to 2008, and Russian steps to stop “genocide” in progress is still the Russian version of the start of the war. This narrative, carefully managed by Russian reporters, and personally delivered to U.S. President George W. Bush by Vladimir Putin, the freshly appointed Russian Prime Minister, at the opening ceremony to the Beijing Olympic Games, largely succeeded in minimizing any outcry from the West.²⁵¹ The Russian narrative dismisses claims that the Russians deliberately invaded Georgia, by countering that the requisite approval for military action had not been passed by the Duma, and that Putin was highly upset that a military clash had been instigated by the Georgians and the defensive response had occurred without his

²⁴⁹ David J. Smith, “The Saakashvili Administration’s Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 133–135.

²⁵⁰ Cornell and Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, 3. See also the description of this seeding of Russian reporters into the conflict zone days before the invasion as described by Johanna Popjanevski in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, 149.

²⁵¹ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 60. It should be noted that Putin had officially stepped down from the Russian Presidency at the end of his constitutionally mandated term limit. He was officially replaced by his protégé, Dmitry Medvedev, only three months before the invasion. Putin was then appointed by Medvedev as Russia’s Prime Minister. Many in the West chose to believe this “stepping aside” was demonstrative of Putin’s intent to abide by international expectations for leaders to relinquish power through popular elections. All indications are that this entire process was orchestrated theater to play to just such expectations. Putin was still the real power in Russia and his policies for Georgia were executed at his direction regardless of his official title at the time of the invasion.

approval.²⁵² As late as the afternoon of August 7th, Georgian media was reporting that talks between the Georgian government and the South Ossetians were underway to diffuse the situation.²⁵³

In 1999, Ludvig Chibirov, the leader of South Ossetia, signed a deal with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze that laid the ground work for a settlement where South Ossetia would cease armed opposition and submit to Georgian sovereignty in exchange for an increased degree of autonomy. While this settlement seemed the most likely path to peace and a lasting agreement between the Georgians and South Ossetians (an outcome that a legitimate mediator and peacekeeper would have supported) the Russians realized that it would complicate any future efforts to control South Ossetia. Russian operatives helped engineer the electoral defeat of Chibirov and promoted a pro-Russian candidate, Eduard Kokoity, a former wrestling champion with ties to organized crime.²⁵⁴ As soon as Kokoity won, he began promoting South Ossetian independence through war with Georgia, eliminating local elites who disagreed with his militant position, and ultimately maneuvering the South Ossetian parliament to declare independence and petition the Russian Federation for membership.²⁵⁵ Russian intelligence officers quickly assumed leadership roles in a number of South Ossetia's ministries under Kokoity, and Russia began providing a large part of the budget for both of the breakaway regions.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 60. See also: Pavel K. Baev, *Russian "Tandemocracy" Stumbles into a War*, (Moldova.org, 2008). <http://www.moldova.org/analysis-russian-tandemocracy-stumbles-into-a-war-141638-eng/>. Putin regime critic Pavel K. Baev takes the presence of Putin in Beijing and Medvedev at a resort in Volga as an indicator of Russian confusion and a lack of control over the Southern military that led to the Russians "stumbling" into the war with Georgia. In his effort to criticize what he sees as confusion among the Russian political-military elite, Baev doesn't see this apparent confusion for what it was, the deliberate masking of the dynamic shift to the overt military nature of the conflict that was betrayed by the coordinated dominance of the information domain, the crippling cyber-attacks on the Georgian command and control networks, and the naval blockades of the Georgian ports.

²⁵³ Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 151.

²⁵⁴ Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 73.

²⁵⁵ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 52.

²⁵⁶ Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 73.

In November of 2003, the so-called “Rose Revolution” was in full swing, and Eduard Shevardnadze was in danger of being ousted. The former Soviet-minister-turned-Georgian-patriot was a far less dangerous proposition for Vladimir Putin than the sudden success of a populist, pro-Western democratic movement taking root outside of Western Europe. Moscow offered to “help” Shevardnadze again in exchange for similar demands imposed during the 1993 resolution of the Abkhaz War where Georgia would again have to “accept Russian hegemony, abandon its pro-Western orientation, forget about [joining] NATO and the EU, and appoint Russian nominees to key security positions.”²⁵⁷ Shevardnadze was ultimately unwilling to use force to put down the opposition movement and he resigned on November 23rd. Following NATO’s retreat from extending membership to Ukraine and Georgia in early 2008, the Russians correctly interpreted a lack of European commitment to rush to the defense of either. The Russian Foreign Minister went so far as to send a telegram to his Georgian counterpart to inform him that Russia was dealing directly with Abkhazia to transfer Russian citizens held in Abkhazian prisons directly to Russian authorities, a blatant violation of international respect for Georgian’s sovereignty.²⁵⁸

C. NON-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: ECONOMIC, LEGAL, PROPAGANDA, AND MIGRATION WARFARE

From the late 1990s through the 2008 war, Russia employed numerous hybrid warfare activities to undermine Georgian sovereignty and to set the conditions for Russia to assume control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One of Russia’s principle instruments on non-military coercion was through economic warfare. In 1995, Georgian President Shevardnadze described increasing Russian efforts to undermine the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline what would enable central Asian oil to by-pass Russia on the way to European markets.²⁵⁹ In September 2004, Moscow closed all transportation links with Georgia, including Russian airspace for Georgian airlines (a violation of numerous international agreements). These moves were ostensibly to collect debt owed by Georgian

²⁵⁷ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 45–46.

²⁵⁸ Smith, *The Saakashvili Administration’s Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War*, 133.

²⁵⁹ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 39.

commercial businesses to Russian investors, but in reality they were punitive for Georgia's independent associations with European and U.S. commercial interests.²⁶⁰ In December 2005, the Russian administration attempted to get the heads of Russian energy businesses to stop supplying Georgia with gas and electricity (in the dead of winter).²⁶¹ When the executives were less than cooperative, the gas and electrical transmission lines were physically cut by saboteurs. In December 2006, GAZPROM, Russia's state-controlled natural gas conglomerate, announced that Georgian gas prices would be doubled in 2007. Georgia was forced to agree to this drastic fee hike when GAZPROM threatened to cut off the supplies altogether.²⁶² "During 2006 Moscow worked persistently to inflict economic pain on Georgia in retaliation for Tbilisi's efforts to counteract Russian subversion on its territory."²⁶³ Russia did not confine these efforts to the flow of energy into Georgia, but also through the restriction of Georgian consumer products entering into Russia. In the spring of 2006, Russia banned imports of Georgian wine and several brands of bottled mineral water.²⁶⁴ These bans were soon followed by a complete embargo on Georgian goods.²⁶⁵

Once the open fighting between Russian regulars and the Georgian army started in August 2008, the Russian Navy blockaded the Georgian Black Sea ports and several critical highway junctions between the coast and the interior.²⁶⁶ Given that these actions took place after the onset of open conventional fighting, they are not outside the normal practices of what any conventional power would consider as legitimate military operations and do not constitute a substantive case for hybrid warfare by themselves. It should be noted, however, that the hybrid nature of a conflict is not completely discarded

²⁶⁰ Ana K. Neidermeier, *Countdown to War in Georgia: Russia's Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of the Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2008): 180.

²⁶¹ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 60.

²⁶² "Singled Out: Russia's Detention and Expulsion of Georgians" (Human Rights Watch, 2007), <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/russia1007/index.htm>.

²⁶³ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 60.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁶⁵ Niklas Nilsson, "Georgia's Rose Revolution: The Break with the Past," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 101.

²⁶⁶ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 153.

by the beginning of open conventional warfare, nor do any of these activities have to take place in a particular linear order. On August 16th, three days *after* the cease fire, Russian military planes destroyed the economically vital railway bridge at Kaspi and firebombed the Borjomi National Park, an important destination for tourism.²⁶⁷

In addition to the increasing efforts to strangle the Georgian economy, Russia also invoked the legal authority of international bodies to weaken Georgia's ability to assert control over its breakaway territories. On the symbolic 1st anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Vladimir Putin made the public claim that Georgia was permitting, if not facilitating, Chechen terrorists operating against Russia from the sanctuary of the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia. Putin invoked the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 to claim Georgia's violation of the counter-terrorism resolution, and he then declared that Russia had the internationally recognized right under Article 51 of the UN Charter to strike targets in Georgia as a matter of Russian self-defense.²⁶⁸ Putin demanded that Georgia demonstrate its sovereignty by securing its borders while simultaneously undermining that sovereignty through the arming and urging separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Shevardnadze responded by declaring Georgia's intention to join NATO.

Russia's legal warfare activities extended into the realm of migration warfare when Russia granted citizenship to an entire population outside of Russia's borders. As opposed to Colonels Liang and Xiangsui's proposal to use waves of immigrants to destabilize a foreign region, Russia allowed for the opposite movement of migrants as one of its first acts of undermining Georgian sovereignty. In November 2000, eight years before the open "war," Russia passed a law requiring all Georgian visitors to obtain visas before traveling to Russia.²⁶⁹ This action was in direct contravention of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) charter which explicitly mandates freedom

²⁶⁷ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 153. For an account from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the ecological and economic impacts of the Russian firebombing of Borjomi Forest after the ceasefire see also: <http://georgiamfa.blogspot.com/2008/08/environment-devastated-by-russian.html>

²⁶⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Speech at a Meeting of the Heads of Security and Military Agencies," September 11, 2002, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21717>.

²⁶⁹ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia Will Introduce Visa Regime with Georgia," *Moscow Times*, November 28, 2000, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2000/11/article/russia-will-introduce-visa-regime-with-georgia/257144.html>.

of travel between the member states. The Russians then made a “humanitarian” exception for residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This move undermined Georgian sovereignty and strengthened Russian influence in both breakaway regions. Russia followed up this action by extending Russian citizenship for the Abkhaz and Ossetian populations through the issuance of Russian passports to “non-Georgian” residents in both regions, a clear indicator that Russia was already laying the groundwork for subsequent annexation.²⁷⁰ Russia had in essence made the Abkhazians and South Ossetians into Russians and therefore entered them into a protected status that would theoretically justify their defense militarily under the Russian Yeltsin-Putin policy for protecting “Russians” in the post-Soviet space. Russia not only granted Russian citizenship to the populations of Georgia’s breakaway regions, but in 2006, Russia also began deporting Georgian citizens from the Russian Federation regardless of long-standing residency.²⁷¹

D. MILITARY FORMS OF WAR

Russia used the Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatist militias to conduct surrogate warfare against the Georgian military for years prior to the invasion. In February 2003, Russia responded to (its political surrogate) Eduard Kokoity’s request for military assistance and provided South Ossetia with military equipment including twelve T-55 tanks.²⁷² In mid-2004, Russia provided the South Ossetians with “an additional seventy-five T-72 battle tanks and huge stocks of weaponry and ammunition.”²⁷³ Russia’s additional contributions to the South Ossetian arsenal included numerous multiple-launch rocket systems, self-propelled artillery and eventually an active Russian Army Colonel to serve as the South Ossetian Minister of Defense.²⁷⁴ Russian “peacekeepers” were actively training and arming South Ossetians in 2006 and had even

²⁷⁰ Gordadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s*, 45.

²⁷¹ “Singled Out: Russia’s Detention and Expulsion of Georgians” (Human Rights Watch, 2007), <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/russia1007/index.htm>.

²⁷² Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 54.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

shot down a Georgian military helicopter flying over Georgian airspace.²⁷⁵ Russian military officers served in command positions of both the South Ossetian and Abkhazian militias. When the August invasion was slowed by the Roki Tunnel bottleneck, South Ossetian militia served as infantry alongside the advancing Russian columns. As the fighting opened up near Gori, the Russian regular forces continued to press the Georgian army, while the Ossetian militia systematically cleansed the villages in surrounding countryside of ethnic Georgians, an effort that did not stop with the August 12th ceasefire.²⁷⁶

Russia also conducted acts of sabotage, both unilaterally and through surrogates, to facilitate economic and political warfare efforts. In September and October of 2004, “South Ossetian” saboteurs severely damaged high-voltage transmission lines in western and central Georgia that served as the principle power sources for Tbilisi.²⁷⁷ Saboteurs also destroyed natural gas and electrical transmission lines in January of 2006, leaving much of Georgia dark and cold for several days in the middle of winter. This time the attack occurred inside Russian territory and involved synchronized operations in remote locations.²⁷⁸ While this attack might not seem to have an immediate impact, and Russia quickly helped restore the flow of oil through a rehabilitated pipeline from Azerbaijan, it did serve to identify infrastructure backup systems for comprehensive targeting in the future.

Russia was not content to rely solely on isolated acts of sabotage to strengthen its advantage over Georgia. It also employed conventional Russian weapon systems under the thinnest veils of covert cover. On March 11th, 2007, several ethnic Georgian villages were shelled with GRAD rockets from Abkhaz controlled territory while Russian

²⁷⁵ Mikheil Saakashvili, “Full Text: Saakashvili’s Address at UN General Assembly - 2006,” *Civil Georgia*, September 22, 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13622>.

²⁷⁶ Felgenhauer, *After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War*, 176.

²⁷⁷ “Saakashvili Says Energy ‘Saboteurs Destroyed.’” *Civil Georgia*, October 21, 2004, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8129>.

²⁷⁸ C. J. Chivers, “Georgia Reopens Old Gas Line to Ease Post-Blast Shortage,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/24/international/europe/24georgia.html?_r=0.

helicopter gunships patrolled overhead in the Kodori Gorge region of Abkhazia.²⁷⁹ On May 11th, 2007, a Georgian “government-in-exile” facility for the province of Abkhazia was attacked by “unidentified” helicopter and ground forces. The Russians denied any involvement but international investigators determined that only the Russian military was capable of carrying out such an operation.²⁸⁰ On August 7th, 2007, two Russian SU-27s bombed a Georgian radar station on the border of South Ossetia. Russia blamed Georgia for staging the attack after an unexploded munition was positively verified as having been of Russian origin and employed by Russian aircraft.²⁸¹ On April 20th, 2008, UN observers verified that a Georgian UAV was shot down over Abkhazia by a Russian MIG-29, “constituting a clear and distinct act of aggression.”²⁸²

Russian military forms of warfare were not limited to strikes against military, economic or government facilities. Car bombs, improvised explosive devices, and targeted assassinations more commonly defined as acts of terrorism were also employed against the Georgians. On February 2nd, 2005, a car bomb with over 100kg of explosives was detonated in front of the Georgian police headquarters in Gori, killing three policemen and wounding 27 others.²⁸³ Georgian investigators would link this attack to the Russian GRU.²⁸⁴ The following day, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, the principle negotiator for a lasting settlement with South Ossetia, died of “accidental” carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty space heater; prompting speculation, but no

²⁷⁹ “Georgia Says Villages in Kodori Shelled.” *Civil Georgia*, March 12, 2007, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14758>.

²⁸⁰ Eli Lake, “Russia Waged Covert War on Georgia Starting in ‘04,” *Washington Times*, December 2, 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/dec/2/russia-waged-covert-war-on-georgia-starting-in-04/?page=all>.

²⁸¹ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 66.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁸³ Theresa Freese, “Gori Residents Search for Reasons Behind Recent Car-Bombing,” *Eurasianet.Org*, February 3, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020405a.shtml>

²⁸⁴ “Georgian Minister: Russian Intelligence Service behind Gori Blast.” *Civil Georgia*, July 25, 2005, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10425>

solid proof, that he was murdered by the Russians.²⁸⁵ A number of bombings directed at civilians in Abkhazia were carried out in late June and early July 2008. Six civilians were wounded by blasts in the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi, and in a Black Sea resort before an explosive attack at a café in the town of Gali killed four and wounded eight on July 6th.²⁸⁶ While Abkhaz officials were quick to blame Georgia for the attack and to close the defacto border between Abkhazia and Georgia proper, the fatal attack was carried out in a predominantly Georgian town and the only apparent political beneficiaries were the Abkhazians and their Russian sponsors.²⁸⁷ A number of explosive attacks were also carried out in South Ossetia in early July targeting Georgian police and government administrators.²⁸⁸ Russia quickly blamed these attacks on the Georgians as false flag efforts to destabilize South Ossetia and garner international support for an increased military presence.

As Russia moved toward a conventional conflict with Georgia, Russian military forces were regularly mobilized for maneuvers near the Georgian border. This overt military posturing was meant to intimidate the Georgians into giving certain concessions, and would ultimately ensure that the forces necessary for the actual invasion was assembled well in advance of the actual invasion. On September 29th, 2006, Russia responded to the arrest of several GRU officers in Georgia by alerting the Black Sea Fleet and Russian Forces in the North Caucasus. The fleet began maneuvers off of Georgia's coast and the army moved to the Georgian border. These forces did not just show force, but implemented a full embargo on Georgia, preventing all commercial traffic and travel.²⁸⁹ From April until late July 2008, Russian Airborne and Mountain forces conducted a series of large scale maneuvers along the Georgian border. The numbers of Russian "peacekeepers" in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were simultaneously increased to

²⁸⁵ Zaal Anjaparidze, "Zhvania's death still controversial topic in Georgia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Volume: 2 Issue: 106 (June 01, 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27701&no_cache=1#.VmDgO3bTmUk.

²⁸⁶ RIA Novosti, "4 Killed, 8 Wounded in Abkhazia," *b92.net*, July 7, 2008, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/world.php?yyyy=2008&mm=07&dd=07&nav_id=51700.

²⁸⁷ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 147.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁸⁹ Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World : Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 72.

well beyond their mandated levels as were their levels of armament; particularly artillery, anti-tank weapons, and anti-aircraft systems.²⁹⁰ In July 2008 as a small scale annual military exercise involving Georgian, American, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani soldiers was held outside Tbilisi, Russia started its own unannounced exercise involving more than 8000 Russian troops from the 58th Army, and the Black Sea Fleet under the auspices of a regional counter-terrorism exercise.²⁹¹ The exercise, “Kavkaz 2008,” included hundreds of combat vehicles and aircraft in roles that were not particularly well suited for counter-terrorism so much as a large-scale conventional attack; that individual Russian soldiers were provided with training products labeled “Soldier, know your enemy” that included lists of Georgian units, equipment and capabilities leaves little doubt that the exercise was a rehearsal for the eventual invasion.²⁹² This exercise ended in late July, but the Russian forces were never demobilized. The land forces remained in place along the border until August 7th when they advanced in to Georgia to “reinforce” Russian peacekeepers.

One of the novel aspects of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War was the introduction of cyber warfare as a complement to a ground attack. The United States had considered a similar effort five years earlier during the invasion of Iraq but ultimately ruled a cyber-offensive out over concerns for the impact on the global economy and for setting a precedent for which the U.S. itself might have a high degree of vulnerability. The United States also enjoyed a significant conventional advantage over the Iraqis and did not believe that widespread cyber disruption was necessary to dominate the battlefield. Russia, on the other hand, was aware that its ground forces had significant shortcomings. While the Russians significantly outnumbered the Georgians, Russia needed to ensure a quick victory lest a protracted campaign provide a window for external intervention. What Russia learned from its strategic miscalculation in attacking Estonian computer networks a year earlier was that “attacks” in the cyber domain can be an annoyance to the victim, and can exact some real price, but they are largely insufficient in and of

²⁹⁰ Illarionov, *The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008*, 69–71.

²⁹¹ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 148.

²⁹² Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 21.

themselves to force an enemy to accept the aggressor's political will. For several weeks prior to the Russian offensive in Georgia, however, non-attributable Russian "hacktivists" conducted a similar computer network attack (CNA) with the strategic focus of severing Tbilisi's command and control of the Georgian armed forces, rallying ethnic Russian, Ossetians, and Abkhazians to the Russian cause, and to isolate Georgia from the rest of the world.²⁹³ The cyber offensive against Georgia maintained the unlikely story of spontaneous "patriotic hackers" even after the ceasefire, but the timed coordination with the ground assault, the selectivity of strategically disruptive targets while bypassing critical national infrastructure, and the introduction of cyber graffiti that was prepared years in advance, are all indicative of a very deliberate, synchronized Russian offensive in the cyber domain alongside the physical offensives in the land, air, and sea domains.²⁹⁴

As Russian forces poured into Georgia on August 7th, the conventional military became the primary effort to secure Russia's dominion over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, supplanting Russia's hybrid efforts with traditional warfare. Almost as soon as Moscow announced the completion of the railway renovation to Sukhumi, Abkhazia, numerous small scale engagements including mortar attacks, mine detonations, and sniping, broke out between Georgian forces and separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²⁹⁵ When Russia claimed its peacekeepers had lost the ability to restrain the South Ossetian breakaway forces (whose Russian Army officer/Defense Minister had just petitioned North Ossetia for active military assistance) Russia was able to convince Georgia to agree to a ceasefire so that more Russian peacekeepers could be brought in to enforce order.²⁹⁶ The Georgians agreed and held their fire as Russian convoys entered South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the evening of August 7th. After abiding by the ceasefire for several hours and losing police stations and administrative buildings to increasing separatist artillery fire, the Georgians used artillery to block the Russian columns from

²⁹³ Paulo Shakarian, "The 2008 Russian Cyber Campaign Against Georgia," *Military Review* (November-December, 2011), 63–68.

²⁹⁴ David Hollis, "Cyberwar Case Study: Georgia 2008," *Small Wars Journal* (January 06, 2011).

²⁹⁵ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 149.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

pushing all of the way to Tskhinvali in South Ossetia.²⁹⁷ This shelling is still claimed by Russia as the initiation of hostilities that necessitated a massive Russian response to protect its peacekeeping forces.²⁹⁸ On the morning of August 8th, Russian aircraft attacked Georgian government and civilian locations outside of the contested areas at almost the same time as Russian cyber-attacks crippled Tbilisi's Internet, command and control infrastructure and news services.²⁹⁹

E. CONCLUSION

Even as the dust was settling in Moscow following the failed 1991 coup attempt, Russia recognized the need to prevent a stable and democratic Georgia from forming on the Federation's southern border. Russia had a strategic need to be able to project military force south of the Caucasus, which would be increasingly difficult if Georgia solidified its control over its territory. Russian siding with South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists was an initial way to destabilize Georgia while Moscow dealt with other more-pressing issues. Throughout the Yeltsin and Putin administrations, Moscow maintained a strategic goal of asserting direct control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and preventing Georgia from achieving membership in the European Union and NATO. Russia's way of manifesting this outcome was to conduct an extended hybrid warfare campaign to undermine the Georgian political and military systems, while strengthening Russia's hold over the two breakaway provinces.

Russia either created or exacerbated conditions in Georgia through hybrid warfare with the ultimate goal of undermining Georgian sovereignty. Russia exploited political fissures in Tbilisi, and even offered to prop up President Shevardnadze after the Rose Revolution, in exchange for Russia controlling the top ministerial positions of his government, a position which would have ended the nascent conflict through the defacto surrender of government autonomy to Moscow as it did in 1993. Russia systematically

²⁹⁷ Popjanevski, *From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia*, 152.

²⁹⁸ The Russians also claimed that Georgian forces had massacred thousands of South Ossetian civilians as part of the pretext for Russian intervention. This claim served to give pause to the international community and to enrage the South Ossetian militia, who in turn "cleansed" a number of Georgian villages during their counteroffensive.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

removed rapprochement minded Abkhaz and South Ossetians, and replaced them with separatist proxies whose ministries and staffs were led by Russian officers. With the conditions set to prevent Georgia from peacefully resolving the conflict and Russian “peacekeepers” positioned between the conflicting sides, Russia then used the controlled application of violence, economic coercion, propaganda, and diplomatic pressure to isolate Georgia from the west, portray Georgia as the aggressor, and to justify Russia’s eventual occupation of Russian territory as a defensive and humanitarian gesture.

The Russo-Georgian conflict is an example of hybrid warfare by a state that maintains an offensive-realist perspective and is predisposed to use a wide range of national power, including violence, to coerce an outcome from a neighbor in a time of peace. Russia maintained the strategic goal of maintaining a dominant position in its near-abroad, ending former-Soviet state’s bids for membership in non-Russian controlled bodies, and preventing a liberal government from succeeding on Russia’s borders. The Russian hybrid war against Georgian sovereignty was not solely defined by the 5-day conventional invasion in August 2008. That was merely a brief manifestation of a much longer campaign of forcing Tbilisi to accept Moscow’s will; carefully timed to commence when it wasn’t expected, and concluded before necessitating an international response. Russia used hybrid forms of warfare to effectively divide Georgia and to extend political control over Moscow’s objectives, but it is a mistake to assume this effort concluded with the ceasefire that ended the August 2008 “hot” war. The overt invasion of Georgia forced Tbilisi to accept the dominant presence of the Russian army on Georgian soil, but it was not pursued to the point of a complete national capitulation. To maintain its narrative of legitimacy and forgo the risk associated with a larger war, Russia stopped its advance near the boundaries of the contested rebel territories. From this reinforced military position, Russia has simply changed back to the practice of employing different forms of political warfare and lower levels of violence to continue to prevent a successful democratic government from forming in Tbilisi and frustrating ties between Georgia and NATO. Russia’s hybrid war against Georgia is an ongoing effort, whose more violent manifestation is in a frozen status, but one in which the Kremlin retains the initiative for reigniting when it suits Putin’s designs.

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V. RUSSIAN ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA, 2014

On March 18th, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an amendment to the Russian Constitution admitting the Republic of Crimea and the Federal City of Sevastopol into the Russian Federation. This bold move was a watershed moment in that it marked the first annexation of territory by a foreign power in Europe since World War II. It also was striking in the manner through which it was accomplished. In less than a month tens of thousands of Russian soldiers swarmed onto the peninsula, and supplemented by militia, captured the seat of political power, orchestrated a referendum declaring Crimea sovereign from Ukraine, and forced the surrender of every Ukrainian garrison with very little loss of life, all while professing to the world that Russia was not involved in any way. Since that time, it has become popular to look at the events in Crimea and to link the actions there with the term hybrid warfare. To the extent that the definition of that term only involves the regular and irregular composition of the occupation forces, this is an easy case to make. In order to understand how Russia was able to accomplish this action however, it is necessary to look first at the relationship between Russia and Ukraine in order to see that Russia's hybrid efforts to subvert Ukraine's sovereignty had been underway for years. The annexation of Crimea represented only one strategic objective in this war; an objective that was well defined, could be consolidated in a relatively short period of time, and where the dynamic shift in the political status quo could be temporarily masked by other world events.

A. BACKGROUND

Unlike Georgia, which may be situated on a historical cross-roads, but is nevertheless in a peripheral position from a Western perspective, Ukraine (Figure 3) is a keystone of Eastern Europe and has the size and population to make it comparable to the strongest Western European nations.³⁰⁰ Ukraine was an industrial and agricultural center

³⁰⁰ Alexander J. Motyl, ed., *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993), 1. Ukraine has the fifth largest population in Europe after Germany, Great Britain, Italy and France and had the largest land area of any of these countries before the loss of Crimea in 2014.

within the Soviet Union, and with a highly educated, technologically advanced population, has the necessary components to potentially emerge as an economic peer to Germany, France, and the UK.³⁰¹ Despite a shared ethnic ancestry, tensions between Russia and Ukraine have long existed due to differences in language, religious identity and alignment during conflicts, most significantly World War II.

Figure 3. Map of Ukraine



Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

The largest single factor in Ukraine's struggle to develop a sense of national identity has been, like so many other former Soviet states, a question of ethnicity.³⁰² "Ukraina means borderland," and for a thousand years it has been the frontier between Russian and European empires, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Islam, and Slavic, Turkic and European ethnicities.³⁰³ "Approximately 73 percent of Ukraine's 52 million people are identified as Ukrainian and almost 22 percent as Russian," a distinction that is largely defined by language.³⁰⁴ The line between Ukrainians and Russians has been blurred over the last century with large numbers from both groups who speak both languages, and

³⁰¹ Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, 2.

³⁰² Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, "Ukraine at Twenty: The Search for an Identity," *Carnegie Europe* (December 09, 2011).

³⁰³ Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, 24.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

high rates of intermarriage; nearly one quarter of ethnic Ukrainians are married to a person with a different ethnic or national background.³⁰⁵

Another significant national division is religion. Just over half of Ukrainians are Ukrainian Orthodox of the Kiev Patriarchate, and over a quarter are Ukrainian Orthodox under the Moscow Patriarchate; the latter more closely overlapping with the population that identifies as Russian. The remaining quarter of the population is a mix of Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Jews.³⁰⁶ “Uniate Catholicism has served as the main prop for Ukrainian national identity in western Ukraine” while the Russian Orthodox Church subsumed the Kievan Patriarchate during the Soviet era and was more involved with “Russifying” the Eastern Ukrainians.³⁰⁷ A third division that plays an increasing role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine identity narrative is Ukraine’s status and wartime actions of Ukrainians as the country traded hands between the Nazis and the Soviets during World War II. In an early example of using non-military means to crush Ukrainian nationalist aspirations, Joseph Stalin used intentional famine to starve millions of Ukrainians to death during the 1932–1933 *Holodomor*.³⁰⁸ From 1942 until 1950 Western Ukraine was the operational area of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (OUN-UPA).³⁰⁹ These groups waged guerrilla warfare against the Soviets, and initially welcomed and fought alongside the invading Nazi Army. The OUN-UPA’s nationalist intentions did not welcome Berlin’s domination any more than Moscow’s and they fought against the Nazis and then again against the Soviets as

³⁰⁵ Bohdan Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2002), 17–18.

³⁰⁶ Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, 8. It should be noted that the religious divide does not fall exactly on the same line as ethno-national identity. Not all Russo-Ukrainians are Russian Orthodox, and not all western Ukrainians are Kievan Orthodox or Catholic. Intermarriage between Russians and Ukrainians plays a role in this blend. There are also divisions within Orthodoxy between the Russian Orthodox Church and several branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy with varying degrees of independence from the Moscow Patriarchate, see Harasymiw, 2002, 211. Ukraine is also the home of sizeable Jewish and Muslim populations.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁰⁸ Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1996), 557–564. Magocsi claims that 4.8 million dead is a conservative estimate for the 1933 famine. Famine would be used against Ukraine multiple times during the 1930’s resulting in as many as 10 million deaths, 557.

³⁰⁹ Myroslav Yurkevich, “Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists,” *EUI, Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine* 3 (1993).

Ukraine was alternately dominated by the two powers. The OUN-UPA continued to resist the implementation of communism until they were eventually undermined by KGB infiltration and the mass deportations of Ukrainians to Siberia.³¹⁰ The most well-known of these movements, Stepan Bandera's "Banderites," were a favorite Soviet propaganda device as an example of "pro-Nazi" Ukrainian nationalism. The linkage in the Russian psyche between Banderites, Nazism, and Ukrainian nationalist movements has not lost its appeal, and the Soviet-era messaging has been resurrected as a favorite refrain of the Russian propagandists since early 2014. Unsurprisingly, the post-WWII Ukrainian resistance against the Soviets found little popular support in the predominately Russian eastern Ukrainian oblasts. Further complicating the ethno-linguistic divisions within Ukraine, were the post-World War II Soviet ethnic and administrative shifts regarding the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea.

Crimea is the historic homeland of the Crimean Tatars, a Muslim Turkic people, whose numbers were reduced from 83 percent of the peninsula's population to around 25 percent during the Tsarist-Russian conquest and occupation from 1793 to the early 20th century.³¹¹ "In 1944, the entire Tatar population was forcibly resettled to Central Asia for allegedly collaborating with the Nazis."³¹² In 1954, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev gifted Crimea to the Ukraine for administrative control, but Tatar efforts to be repatriated to the peninsula were repeatedly stymied despite similar ethnic resettlement in other Soviet oblasts.³¹³ The principle reasons for this refusal were the Tatar's ethnic ties to NATO member Turkey, Crimea's status as a vacation destination for Russian elites, and the peninsula's strategic position as the Soviet's warm water port for the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol.³¹⁴ Whatever the reasons for Khrushchev's transfer

³¹⁰ The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was primarily opposed to Soviet dominion of Ukraine and initially worked with the Nazi Army to fight against the Red Army; which has provided the basis for Putin's narrative that the Ukrainian Nationalists are "Nazis." While the OUN did draw some of its inspiration from Mussolini's fascism as a counter to anarchic movements, the Ukrainian Nationalist Insurgent Army fought for an independent Ukraine against the Polish communists and later against both the Nazis and the Soviets, and was comprised of several contentious factions who initially espoused and later rejected totalitarianism.

³¹¹ Motyl, *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, 10.

³¹² Ibid., 10.

³¹³ Ibid., 10–11.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

of political control of Crimea to Ukraine, when Ukraine broke away from the Soviet Union in 1991, its internationally recognized borders included the entirety of the Crimean peninsula. This, however, does not mean that the Crimean population was wholly ready to embrace a new Ukrainian national identity.

Even before Ukraine's departure from the USSR, the dominant Russian political entities in Crimea made a push for everything from autonomy to full independence, along with similar movements in the Donetsk Basin, (Donbas) and other Russian majority oblasts in Ukraine's south and east.³¹⁵ Crimea was granted a protected autonomous status by the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in 1991, and the secessionist movement largely dissipated.³¹⁶ A survey of the 1994 elections in Ukraine and Crimea revealed a society sharply divided along ethno-linguistic lines; Crimea even more so due to the sizeable minority of ethnic Tatars who were slowly returning to their historic homeland.³¹⁷ The theme of rejoining Crimea with Russia was always a popular rhetorical position for post-Soviet Russian nationalists in both Moscow and Simferopol, but was flatly rejected by the Tatars. National identity preferences of the population aside, post-Soviet Crimea remained a point of contention between Russia and Ukraine as arrangements were made for the distribution of former Soviet military forces, equipment, and bases throughout the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The most significant of the issues with respect to Crimea was the ownership of the Sevastopol-based Black Sea Fleet.³¹⁸

When Ukraine separated from the Soviet Union, it inherited a vast military arsenal estimated to include 750,000 men, 6,500 tanks, 1,494 combat aircraft, 833 ships

³¹⁵ Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, 21.

³¹⁶ The port city of Sevastopol enjoyed further autonomy as a federal city within this arrangement and the two entities, Crimea and Sevastopol, were listed separately in the constitutional amendment for their accession to the Russian Federation in 2014.

³¹⁷ Maria Drohobychky, ed., *Crimea: Dynamics, Challenges and Prospects* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 121–128. The Tatars represent a threat to the pro-Russian position due to the Tatars' resentment for being forcibly expelled from their land by Stalin, and the Tatars continued support for Crimean alignment with Kiev during the Russian annexation in 2014.

³¹⁸ Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, 24.

and as many as 1,850 nuclear weapons.³¹⁹ It emerged from the Cold War with the second largest military in Europe (behind Russia) and the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world. Ukraine also inherited a broken economy, massive debt, and no ready means for maintaining this extremely expensive military force. From 1992 to 1998, Ukraine outpaced CIS and Conventional Force in Europe (CFE) treaty requirements by reducing the size of the army to around 300,000 men, and scrapping thousands of tanks, armored vehicles and combat aircraft.³²⁰ In 1994, the leaders of Great Britain, the United States, Russia and Ukraine signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, where Ukraine's relinquishing of nuclear weapons was reciprocated with pledges of respect for territorial sovereignty and political independence.³²¹ Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas was in direct violation of paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of the agreement. This violation is a clear example of Moscow's willingness to set aside legal obligations out of pure pragmatism, despite Putin's preferences for wrapping his actions with the airs of legalism. In 1993, renowned strategist John Mearsheimer advocated keeping a nuclear capability in Ukraine in order to deter future Russian incursions, but the Clinton administration firmly asserted that a world where fewer countries had nuclear weapons was inherently more desirable.³²² The Ukrainians were also initially reluctant to give up this arsenal because they realized the amount of deterrence it provided them if the Russian federation were to reverse its permissiveness regarding the autonomy of former Soviet republics. The failure to enforce the Budapest Memorandum may have serious consequences for future non-proliferation efforts elsewhere.

The most contentious subject in Ukraine and Russia's post-Soviet distribution of forces remained the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet.³²³ Ownership of the fleet itself

³¹⁹ Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, 403–407.

³²⁰ Ibid., 403–406.

³²¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994," December 5, 1994, <http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/budapest-memorandums-security-assurances-1994/p32484>.

³²² John J. Mearsheimer, "Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer, 1993), 50–66. See also: Oren Dorell, "Ukraine may have to Go Nuclear, Says Kiev Lawmaker," *USA Today*, March 11, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/03/10/ukraine-nuclear/6250815/>.

³²³ Drohobycky, *Crimea: Dynamics, Challenges and Prospects*, 136.

was not so much the problem, as its simple maintenance was too costly for either Russia or Ukraine and its Cold War configuration did not meet Russian or Ukrainian security needs.³²⁴ The real issue was what the Sevastopol-based force represented with respect to Ukrainian sovereignty. The continued basing of a significant “foreign” naval power, including thousands of sailors, naval infantry and intelligence personnel, at a Ukrainian port, coupled with Russia’s promotion of Russian-aligned Crimean political entities was an untenable position for Kiev. Even more pressing however, were Ukraine’s extreme financial shortcomings. In May of 1997, the Russian and Ukrainian Prime Ministers signed an agreement that split the fleet roughly in half; Ukraine then gave the Russians 117 of Ukraine’s allotment of 254 ships in exchange for over \$500 million in debt forgiveness, and Russia signed a \$100 million per year lease for basing the fleet at Sevastopol for 20 years.³²⁵

Russia’s ability to force a definitive resolution to the Crimean situation in the early 1990s was limited due to turmoil in Moscow and the outbreak of violence in several other former Soviet states, but the idea that Crimea should never have been given to Ukraine and that the peninsula should be reunited with Russia was often promoted by Russian leaders during the Yeltsin administration.³²⁶ The Russian Supreme Soviet even declared Russian ownership of Sevastopol in 1993, but lacked the resources to give this claim any real substance.³²⁷ When the Black Sea Fleet issue was resolved in 1997, the calls for annexation of all or part of Crimea lost some of their vigor in the Kremlin, but remained a popular nationalist theme. Even without a focused effort to annex Crimea, the post-Soviet Russians were determined that Ukraine as a whole would remain subordinate to Moscow’s wishes. Years before Putin came to power, the Clinton administration

³²⁴ Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, 412.

³²⁵ Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine*, 413. The expiration of the 20-year lease in 2017 would become a significant factor in Russia’s support for President Yanukovich prior to his ouster in the Euromaidan uprising. The lease was also never paid for in cash from Moscow to Kiev, but was covered with \$100 million dollars of annual debt forgiveness. All values are expressed in U.S. dollars.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³²⁷ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 4.

documented a determined Russian effort to “undermine, subvert or control the governments” of several former Soviet states, including Ukraine.³²⁸

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Ukraine remained an associate-member of the CIS, but refused full membership out of opposition to Russia’s dominate role in setting and enforcing the organization’s economic and defense policies. Ukraine was suspicious of any agreement that might undermine its sovereignty, so it was reluctant to enter into any binding associations, including the CIS that might, ironically, have strengthened its ability to resist Moscow by bringing other members of the charter into any disagreement.³²⁹ Instead, the Ukrainians opted to pursue a bilateral relationship with Russia, which the more powerful Russians were able to dominate without having to violate even the modest constraints of the CIS charter.³³⁰

To practice hybrid warfare as theorized in Chapter II, an aggressor must be willing to violate and undermine another state’s sovereignty during a time of peace. Despite international recognition and guarantees of respect for sovereignty, the Russians never adjusted their view of Ukraine as anything other than a Soviet Republic, subordinate to the wishes of the Moscow. This view was summarized by Vladimir Putin very succinctly during the Russia-NATO Summit in Bucharest in April of 2008 when he shocked U.S. President George W. Bush with a dismissive, “you have to understand, George. Ukraine is not even a county.”³³¹ It was also in 2008 (the same year that Russia removed any doubt about its views on Georgian sovereignty as described in Chapter IV) that Putin approached the Polish Prime Minister and proposed a partition of Ukraine

³²⁸ Uri Ra’anan and Kate Martin, *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 192.

³²⁹ Paul J. D’Anieri, “Interdependence and Sovereignty in the Ukrainian-Russian Relationship,” *European Security* 4, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 604.

³³⁰ Paul J. D’Anieri, *Economic Interdependence in Ukrainian-Russian Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 142–144.

³³¹ Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 244.

between Russia and Poland.³³² Given these statements, and Russia's success in derailing Georgia's efforts toward NATO and European inclusion, 2008 can serve as a general marker for a Russian pivot away from merely dominating Ukraine to a general exploration of how conflicts could be created to sabotage the potential for Ukraine's admission to NATO and how the more strategically valuable parts of Ukraine might be carved off and added to Russia proper.³³³

Russian military thinking further evolved in tandem with proposed military reforms after 2008. Already concerned by the so-called "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space, the authoritarian regime in Moscow became increasingly alarmed as the Arab Spring caught momentum around the Mediterranean in early 2011 and a number of long-standing dictatorships were overthrown or severely challenged. While some of these actions had overt U.S. governmental involvement in their later stages, and others involved Western Non-Governmental Organizations, corporations, or private citizens, the Russians attributed all of the movements, from inception to conclusion, to a deliberate U.S. strategic intention to reshape the political landscape.³³⁴ Russian military leaders began resurrecting and updating the Soviet idea of subversive "active measures" to form

³³² Wiktor Szary, "Did Putin Offer to Split Ukraine with Poland?" *Christian Science Monitor*, October 20, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Latest-News-Wires/2014/1020/Did-Putin-offer-to-split-Ukraine-with-Poland>. In his offer to Poland's Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, Putin again asserted that Ukraine was not a real country and that the historically Polish city of Lviv should go back to Poland. The Russians deny that any such offer was ever made.

³³³ The 2004 election manipulation and 2006 gas war demonstrate Russia's existing hostility toward Ukraine. Stephen Blank contends that the planning for the annexation of Crimea began as early as 2006. See also: Stephen Blank and Peter Hussey, "The Truth about Ukraine," *Gatestone Institute* (August 25, 2014). By 2008, with the invasion and pseudo-partition of Georgia, Russia began to demonstrate real intent that may have only been slowed by the election of Yanukovich in Ukraine and Putin's return to office in 2012. Outright annexation of territory was not part of Russia's action in Georgia. Russia provided Russian citizenship to the South Ossetians and Abkhaz residents as a pretext for intervention, but neither population are ethnic Russians. Russia may have been concerned that an actual annexation might increase the potential for outside intervention, but it is more likely that Moscow recognized the benefits of keeping the dispute open-ended. If the two regions had been annexed, then Georgia may well have cut its losses, relinquished claims to those territories and then pressed harder for NATO membership. By letting South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain technically Georgian, Russia is able to maintain military bases south of the Caucasus, and continue to frustrate Georgia's efforts to integrate with the West due to the unresolved conflict. The strategic value of Sevastopol specifically, the symbolic value of Crimea more generally, and Crimea's importance to Ukrainian energy independence would make actual annexation a much more attractive option to Russia than maintaining an unresolved status. Establishing an unresolved running-sore outside of Crimea, may have been part of the reason for pursuing the subsequent campaign in Donbas.

³³⁴ Putin, *Russia and the Changing World*

a Russian perspective for limited warfare in the 21st Century.³³⁵ In February 2013, a Russian military forum featured an article attributed to the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, describing the Russian thinking and a model (Figure 4) for the conduct of “New Generation Warfare.”³³⁶ In the article, Gerasimov describes the necessary perspective for conducting military actions in peacetime, the use of non-military means to achieve military effects, and the importance of cultivating a supportive population in the target area. Gerasimov’s model was meant to describe the factors and sequence of activities that he believed were behind the Western created Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring, and then to prompt the Russian military establishment to pursue a comparable capability.³³⁷ When Gerasimov’s model was compared to the subsequent annexation of Crimea it was interpreted to be the blueprint for a new type of Russian warfare that looked remarkably different from the blunt use of force observed in other Russian “interventions” in Chechnya and Georgia. Despite being a Russian attempt to explain Western actions, Gerasimov’s model contains some projections of Russian perspectives that are helpful in understanding their general approach to what has been generically labeled in the West as “hybrid warfare.” Gerasimov’s description points to certain characteristics of the aggressor and the nature of the forms of war:

The trend in the 21st century is to erase the line between war and peace ... the “rules of war” have changed dramatically. The role of non-military methods of achieving political and strategic goals, in some cases, has far exceeded the force of arms in terms of effectiveness. The emphasis of the methods of confrontation has shifted towards widespread use of political, economic, information, humanitarian and other non-military measures, implemented by taking advantage of the protest potential of the population. All this is complemented by covert military measures

³³⁵ Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986), 193. “Active measures” was the Soviet term for overt and covert actions taken to influence, subvert and coerce foreign governments through all manner of influence agents, propaganda, deception, paramilitary actions and conventional military maneuvers.

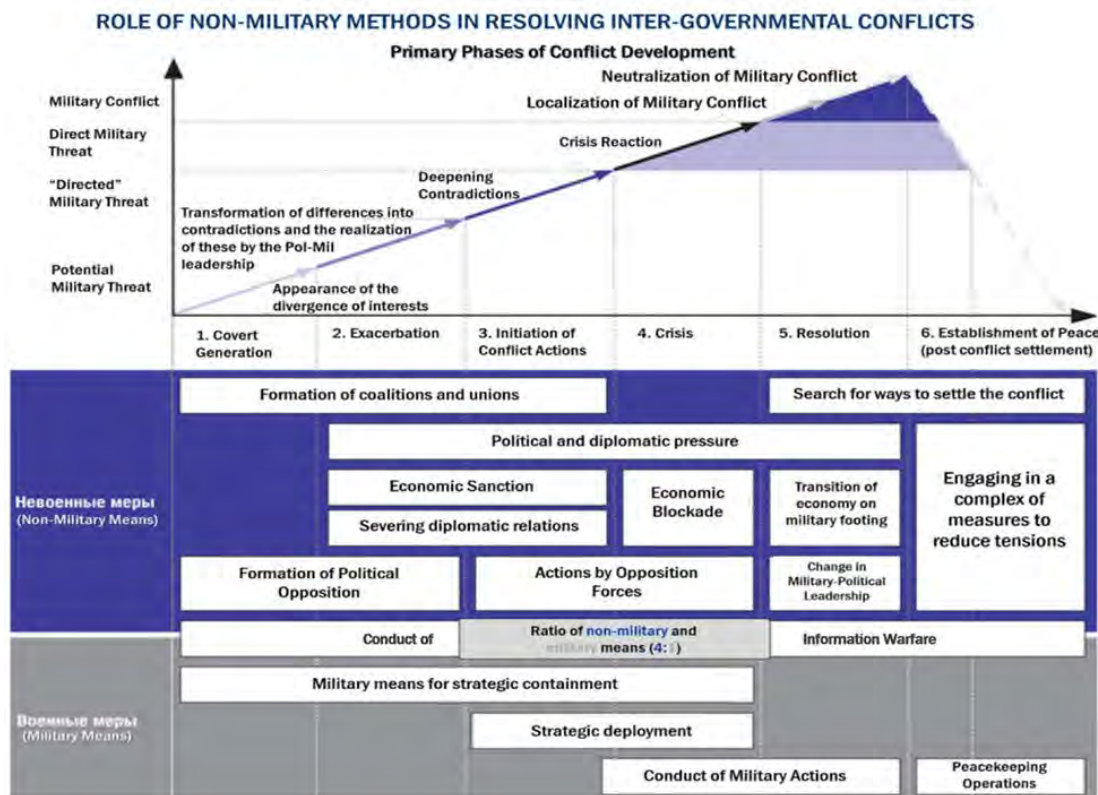
³³⁶ Valery Gerasimov, “Value of Science in Anticipation: New Challenges Require Rethinking of the Forms and Methods of Warfare,” *Military Industrial Courier* (February 27, 2013), <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

³³⁷ The paradox of Russian “hybrid warfare” is that the term is not what the Russian’s themselves use, but they have heard of it and have recycled it as a description of what the Western powers are doing to them. Their confusion is warranted given the wildly different interpretations and applications that have appeared in Western publications.

including information warfare and activities conducted by special operations forces.³³⁸

Gerasimov specifically identified the ability of the state to obtain the objectives of traditional warfare during what the target-state believes to be a time of peace, and that the non-military means of warfare are not only the weaponized instruments of soft power, but that they will be the primary effort in a hybrid campaign. The Gerasimov article was accompanied by a diagram that depicts the synergistic relationship between the military and non-military means of warfare and the importance of information warfare to both.

Figure 4. Gerasimov's New-Generation Warfare Model



Source: Jeffrey V. Dickey et al., "Russian Political Warfare: Origin, Evolution, and Application" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015): 221.

³³⁸ Jefferey V. Dickey et al., "Russian Political Warfare: Origin, Evolution, and Application" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015): 220.

While highly illuminating as to how senior Russian officers were conceptualizing limited warfare campaigns with hybrid forms, the Gerasimov “doctrine” depicts a left-to-right spectrum of linearly intensifying conflict that is deceptive in its sequencing of events. Following this model might lead to the belief that the sequenced phases would only intensify in violence as time progressed; until “peacekeepers” were ultimately employed to stabilize the “crisis.” As theorized in Chapter II, hybrid warfare is not bound to this temporal linearity. Any of the forms of war may be presented in any order that a particular situation warrants, so long as they serve to realize the ultimate objective and are synchronized to achieve the desired effects. For example, if the necessary conditions were still being created, the hybrid aggressor might employ terrorists to foment a political division or the aggressor might sign an international agreement in order to freeze a particular crisis until the conditions for pursuing more deliberate actions became more favorable.³³⁹ If the target state were to begin to successfully counter some of these efforts, the aggressor could reverse course and search for other means to achieve the desired effect. The freezing-thawing cycle keeps the initiative with the aggressor who must simultaneously take efforts to deceive the target state as to his true intentions. Creating uncertainty, or increasing the “friction in war” in Clausewitz’ terms, through information operations, diplomacy, or economic interaction while masking efforts in those same domains to subvert the integrity of the target state permits the aggressor to dramatically change the political dynamic when he judges the timing and conditions to be right.³⁴⁰ This also confirms that the aggressor must maintain a realists’ perspective of the enduring qualities of these relationships. The moment of this dynamic change is also most effective if it does not occur at the end of a linear increase in tensions between the two states but during “peace” while the world’s attention is elsewhere.

Gerasimov’s model also plays to a western desire for closure by depicting a resolution and peaceful settlement to the crisis. In reality, a hybrid warfare aggressor is

³³⁹ Stephen Blank, “Russia and the Black Sea’s Frozen Conflicts in Strategic Perspective,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (Summer, 2008): 23–54. Stephen Blank describes a number of conflicts in the Black Sea and Caucasus areas which Russia has intentionally kept frozen as a means of continuing to maintain forces in the region, exert influence locally, and prevent the areas from joining non-Russian trade or defense blocs.

³⁴⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

no more bound to cease his consolidation of political control over a contested space by the cessation of hostilities than he was by the lack of hostilities at the crisis' beginning. Overt violence should visibly decrease to reduce the stimulus for international intervention. Less visible use of force however, such as the detention or killing of potential political opponents, population control measures including checkpoints, bans on public rallies, control over the Internet and other media, demographic shifts through expulsion, deportation, and ethnic cleansing, and resource controls over electricity, heating oil, food, gasoline, banking services, and control of pensions are all still instruments used by the aggressor to ensure the longevity of the new status quo.

Gerasimov does not use the term “hybrid” but his model depicts the two necessary components: non-military means of political warfare and the use of military force. Gerasimov even supplies a ratio of 4:1 (non-military to military) to ensure the lesser role of force is clearly established. The nature of the aggressor state can be determined both in the model and in Gerasimov's description, and is notable for its ability to synchronize diplomacy, economic activity, and information operations with the covert creation of surrogate political and military organizations well in advance of any direct hostilities. It is somewhat ironic that Gerasimov assigns these attributes to the West, when the necessary degree of control over information and economic instruments of power are much better directed in a centralized, authoritarian political system. Interestingly, Gerasimov's model specifically lists “opposition forces” (proxy forces or surrogates) as a non-military means, so his division is not based on use of violence, but apparently on the organic, attributable nature of the aggressor state's military power. Because Gerasimov ties increased military force to the same temporal linearity, this model creates the impression that changes in phases will be necessarily preceded or accompanied by requisite increases in forces. What the model fails to illustrate is the cyclic application of hybrid political and military efforts to wear down local and international deterrence, as Alexander Svechin theorized in the *Strategy of Attrition*, which would be followed by the sudden, calculated, dynamic change to the status quo.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940*, 129.

Besides describing the blurring of distinctions between war and peace, and the achievement of military-like effects through non-military means, Gerasimov identifies a critical component that does not receive enough weight in most discussions of hybrid warfare; the “protest potential of the population.” Discussions of surrogates, irregulars, political proxies and other elements derived from the target area’s native population often presuppose that some disaffected population is already in place and waiting for a sponsor to mobilize them. The absence of such sentiment might not completely remove the possibility of conducting hybrid warfare as economic, diplomatic and informational activities could still be employed, but a sympathetic population provides the aggressor with a degree of political and military power within the target’s territory, as well as the potential to frame aggression as intervention.

B. HYBRID WARFARE REQUISITE CONDITIONS

1. Russian Strategic Goals

The importance Vladimir Putin places on the power vertical—the enduring central authority of the state, and his unique role at the apex of that structure—is a reminder that Putin’s most pressing priority is to ensure the continuity of *his* government. Following his 2008 political-theater hiatus as Prime Minister, Putin reassumed the title of Russian President in 2012. Despite his suppression of political opposition and his self-promotion through the state’s media, Putin narrowly won the popular vote based on his ability to exclude any viable opposition candidate and his supporters’ employment of widespread fraud.³⁴² By mid-2013, Putin’s domestic popularity had dropped to under 45 percent and was trending down.³⁴³ With a personal stake in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, the preparations for which were the source of much domestic discontent due to widespread

³⁴² Boris Nemtsov, *Putin. War* (Moscow: Free Russia Foundation (English Translation), 2015), 5. It should be noted that Boris Nemtsov was one of the leading Russian opposition figures to Putin. For years, Nemtsov opposed Putin’s increasing restrictions on free speech, association, and ability to exclude candidates from electoral consideration. Nemtsov viewed the annexation of Crimea and the war against Ukraine as crises manufactured by Putin to rally nationalist Russian domestic support. Nemtsov’s report, *Putin. War*, was finished by a network of dissident colleagues following his February 2015 murder outside the walls of the Kremlin. It can hardly claim to be objective but it is a well-documented Russian perspective of Putin’s activities and intentions in Ukraine.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

corruption, nepotism, and the graft of tens of billions of dollars of state funds, Putin had to exercise some restraint in handling the Russian opposition in order to preserve the power-building prestige afforded to the games' host. Highly sensitive to the importance of timing, Putin's first strategic goal with respect to Ukraine was to manufacture an external "threat" that would enable him to rally nationalist support and then use that threat as a pretext for crushing any remaining domestic opposition.³⁴⁴ When his unreliable proxy in Kiev, Victor Yanukovych, was unseated during the Euromaidan, Putin was afforded a pretext for intervention by claiming the Euromaidan was a Western plot.

Annexing Crimea prior to the Euromaidan was not likely a specific Russian goal due to the limited efforts that were taken to develop a significant political mechanism or to build significant local support for the action. It is much more probable that the Russians had contingency plans for occupying Crimea as annexes to their ongoing efforts to subvert Ukrainian sovereignty. Seizing Crimea after Yanukovych's ouster, however, did serve Putin's international political purposes. "Putin perceives the European Union as a genuine strategic threat. The threat comes from the EU's potential to reform associated countries in ways that pull them away from Russia."³⁴⁵ Russia has always maintained that it has a vested interest in maintaining a strong (dominant) relationship with the other former-Soviet states, and Russia relies on these relationships to ensure reliable markets for Russian resources, namely oil and gas. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian Eurasianists have been alarmed at the number of former eastern bloc and former Soviet states that have been accepted into these organizations.

³⁴⁴ Amy Oakes, *Diversionary War the Link between Domestic Unrest and International Conflict* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). Oakes describes the practice of waging an unnecessary external war to compensate for internal political shortcomings as "diversionary warfare." Putin's actions in Crimea, if viewed in isolation from the rest of the international stage, fit Oakes' description perfectly, and tamping down domestic opposition to the Olympic construction fraud was certainly a factor in Putin's decision. However, Crimea was not just about domestic diversion. Putin was definitely aware that his move would shock the EU and NATO and he expected to further his international strategic aims as well as fix his flagging domestic popularity.

³⁴⁵ Fiona Hill and Steven Pifer, "Putin's Russia Goes Rogue," *Big Bets & Black Swans, Memorandum to the President* (January 23, 2014), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/01/putin-russia-rogue-hill-pifer>.

Putin views Ukraine's delayed, but still possible, signature of an EU Association Agreement as the greatest threat to his Eurasian Union. If Ukraine adopts EU legislation and regulations, restructures its economy and systems of governance, and enacts European standards in all areas, Ukraine will become more European and, implicitly, less 'Eurasian.' Its vulnerability to Russian economic and political pressure will decrease.³⁴⁶

Putin also observed how effectively he was able to derail Georgia's bid for NATO membership by creating a disqualifying 'unresolved territorial dispute,' and there is no reason he would not look to duplicate that successful template in Ukraine.

Outside of domestic and international political dynamics, Russia places a high degree of strategic value on the control of the Crimean Peninsula due to the basing of the Black Sea Fleet and several thousand Russian naval personnel at Sevastopol. There are no strategic nuclear submarines at Sevastopol, so the Black Sea Fleet is not a part of Russia's nuclear deterrent capability.³⁴⁷ Instead, the fleet is a critical instrument for Moscow's ability to project conventional power from the Sea of Azov to the Persian Gulf. This capability and the lack of an alternative warm water port make the continued basing at Sevastopol a strategic imperative that is vulnerable to the political forces of a foreign government in Kiev. With a pro-Russian regime in Kiev a long-term lease might be acceptable, but the Kremlin's offensive-realist perspective has long chafed at the necessity of having to pay rent to a foreign entity for the privilege. In the wake of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, Ukrainian resolve to join NATO seemed to stiffen, and the continued basing of the Black Sea Fleet at a Ukrainian port became a more contentious issue.³⁴⁸ The situation became more unsettling for the Kremlin in 2009 when Western-leaning Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko declared that the fleet's lease of Sevastopol would not be extended past 2017.³⁴⁹ A year later, this decision was reversed

³⁴⁶ Hill and Pifer, "Putin's Russia Goes Rogue."

³⁴⁷ Hedenskog and Pallin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2013*, 28.

³⁴⁸ "Russian Gunboat Diplomacy in Crimea?" *BBC News*, September 18, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7622520.stm>.

³⁴⁹ Interfax-Ukraine, "Yushchenko: Russian Black Sea Fleet must be Withdrawn by 2017," *Kyiv Post*, November 28, 2009, <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/yushchenko-russian-black-sea-fleet-must-be-withdra-53835.html>.

when the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych became the President of Ukraine and subsequently extended Russia's lease of Sevastopol through 2042.

Depending on foreign sources for naval production also runs counter to Russia's realist belief that only organic, domestic capabilities can guarantee the defense of the state. This point was undoubtedly confirmed when the delivery of French made Mistral heli-carriers was halted in late 2014 due to military embargoes for Russia's actions in Ukraine.³⁵⁰ Permanent possession of Sevastopol's shipyards would also rectify this problem as Putin noted in 2014.³⁵¹ Following the Euromaidan revolution in Kiev, and the rise of a Ukrainian nationalist government, the Kremlin undoubtedly realized that the Russian position in Sevastopol would again become a contentious issue.

There is an energy dimension to the Russian position in Crimea as well. Despite Victor Yanukovych's subordinate relationship to Moscow, other political forces within Ukraine had been forcing him to reduce Ukraine's dependency on Russian gas.³⁵² A part of this Ukrainian effort included developing the expansive natural gas and oil reserves in the Black Sea and Donbas. Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Russian nationalization of Crimean petroleum resources, and the anticipated claims that Russia will make to Ukraine's Black Sea Exclusive Economic Zone, undermines not only Ukraine's energy development but also development by Romania and gas transmission to Europe from Turkey.³⁵³ From an energy standpoint, taking Crimea opens up a potentially profitable resource for Gazprom that may eventually offset the fiscal liability that the peninsula currently represents to Moscow. At the same time it greatly reduces Ukraine's ability to break free from Russian energy dependence and the associated Russian political leverage.

³⁵⁰ Jess McHugh, "France and Russia Mistral Deal: \$1.3 Billion Settlement Reached Over Aircraft Carriers," *International Business Times*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/france-russia-mistral-deal-13-billion-settlement-reached-over-aircraft-carriers-2003044>.

³⁵¹ Kremlin.ru, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin," *Kremlin Sponsored Newscast*, April 17, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>. In Putin's own words, "Crimea has good shipbuilding and ship-repairing potential...The Russian Defense Ministry has already placed an order worth 5 billion rubles with one of the shipyards."

³⁵² Frank Umbach, "The Energy Dimensions of Russia's Annexation of Crimea," *NATO Review Magazine*, 2014.

³⁵³ Ibid.

However, “the Ukrainian conflict and Russia’s annexation of Crimea is ultimately not about energy, but about [political] power.”³⁵⁴

By February 2014, the Euromaidan protests in Kiev had deteriorated into chaos. With Ukrainian central authority in disarray, Putin saw an opportunity to resolve the Black Sea Fleet situation once and for all, reduce Ukraine’s ability to break free from Russia’s orbit, and to play to popular Russian sentiment in a manner that could bolster his flagging domestic popularity. “More than in the conflicts of the early 1990s or even in Georgia in 2008, the Kremlin conceived of the invasion and annexation of Crimea as a deliberate strike against the West, as well as Ukraine. Putin apparently believes that he and Russia have more to gain from open confrontation with the United States and Europe—consolidating his political position at home and boosting Moscow’s international stature—than from cooperation.”³⁵⁵

2. Masking the Dynamic Change to the Status Quo

Just as Russia used the world’s focus on the Beijing Olympics, the crash of the world’s stock markets and American domestic politics to mask its 2008 invasion of Georgia, Putin again calculated that international attention was held elsewhere in February 2014 when he ordered the Russian military to change the political relationship with Crimea. After almost two and a half years of bloody fighting, the Syrian civil war had taken a dramatic turn in the fall of 2013 when ISIS seized the city of Raqqa and began a highly publicized campaign of murder that both outraged the West and created doubts about efforts to overthrow the Assad Regime. Putin undoubtedly drew further conclusions about American willingness to intervene militarily overseas when U.S. President Obama walked back his so-called “redline” against Bashar Al Assad in

³⁵⁴ Frank Umbach, “Russian-Ukrainian-EU Gas Conflict: Who Stands to Lose most?” *NATO Review Magazine*, 2014.

³⁵⁵ Jeffrey Mankoff, “Russia’s Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/ June, 2014), 65–66.

September of 2013.³⁵⁶ Not only was the American willingness to project military force in doubt, but the ability to do so was increasingly questionable following the U.S. government shutdown and subsequent fiscal sequestration in October 2013. With American uncertainty over how best to deal with ongoing post-Arab Spring conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, Putin correctly identified little U.S. or European willingness to become significantly involved in Ukraine when Victor Yanukovych's rejection of European Union association touched off the Euromaidan protests in November 2013.³⁵⁷ At the end of January 2014, the Euromaidan protests against Yanukovych had grown dramatically in size and in violence, but Putin was still meeting with EU leaders and stating his overt policy of non-interference in Ukraine.³⁵⁸ The Europeans took him at his word, but Putin was not likely to do anything that would jeopardize international participation in *his* Winter Olympics at Sochi.

The Sochi Olympics represented a \$50 billion dollar investment for Russia, and Putin was determined to capitalize on the goodwill, significant press coverage, and grandeur of the event to promote Russian identity and his leadership on the world stage. Sochi's location on the Black Sea (between Abkhazia and Crimea) near the restive Caucasus did raise questions about security, especially in the wake of a dual suicide bombing carried out by Chechen terrorists in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) only

³⁵⁶ Glenn Kessler, "President Obama and the 'Red Line' on Syria's Chemical Weapons," *Washington Post*, September 06, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/>. Further bolstering Putin's belief in Russian ascendancy was Putin's ability to intervene in the chemical weapons/ redline debacle to offer Obama a compromise. Russia would destroy Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles in exchange for no Western military action against Assad.

³⁵⁷ Georgi Gotev, "EU Seeks 'Time for Reflection' After Vilnius Summit Failure," *EurActiv.com*, November 29, 2013, <http://www.euractiv.com/global-europe/vilnius-summit-time-reflection-news-532048>. Moscow of course claimed that the protests were all a carefully orchestrated U.S. plot to foment division between Russia and Ukraine. While they saw the hidden hand of U.S. influence behind the Euromaidan, the Russians did not anticipate an overt military response to the annexation of Crimea as long as the process of seizing the peninsula was not a bloodbath.

³⁵⁸ Georgi Gotev, "Spirit of 'Detente' Prevails at EU-Russia Summit," *EurActiv.Com*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/global-europe/spirit-detente-prevails-eu-russi-news-533090>. See also: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20113> for a Russian transcript of the speeches at the Vilnius summit and Putin's affirmation of Ukrainian sovereignty, even as his surrogates were already beginning to organize for the seizure of Crimea.

weeks before the opening ceremony.³⁵⁹ When the games opened on February 7th, tens of thousands of Russian security forces were manning active rings of security around the Black Sea resort while Russian intelligence carried out widespread monitoring of Internet and telephone activity.³⁶⁰ The Sochi Olympic Games officially closed on 23 Feb 2014, the day Putin would later claim he gave the order to execute the Crimean operation.

C. ABOVE-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: DIPLOMATIC, CULTURAL, LEGAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND NETWORK WARFARE

Seizing Crimea militarily was likely not Vladimir Putin's specific goal before the Euromaidan.³⁶¹ Putin would have accepted Ukraine as a unified client-state, dependent on Russia for trade and defense, yet just independent enough to serve as a resurrected Cold War buffer between Russian territory and NATO. That acceptance however, would remain contingent upon a reliable pro-Russian leader in Kiev. When that surrogate was suddenly faced with expulsion from office, Putin recognized the fleeting opportunity to resolve the Crimean issue while bolstering his domestic popularity and he seized it. As early as February 4th 2014, two weeks before Yanukovich's hasty departure from Kiev, Putin's inner circle determined that salvaging the pro-Russian regime in Kiev was a lost cause but the general chaos presented an opportunity to manipulate existing legal procedures to setup several Ukrainian territories for absorption into the Russian

³⁵⁹ Matthias Schepp, "Securing Sochi: Russia's Elite Counter-Terrorism Fighters," *Spiegel Online International*, January 07, 2014, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/elite-spetsnaz-fighters-protect-sochi-winter-olympics-from-terrorism-a-941995.html>.

³⁶⁰ "Putin's 'Ring of Steel' Forming to Protect Winter Olympics in Sochi." *Dallas Morning News*, February 04, 2014, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20140204-putins-ring-of-steel-forming-to-protect-winter-olympics-in-sochi.ece>.

³⁶¹ Robert Coalson, "News Analysis: The Plot to Seize Crimea," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, March 11, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-russia-putin-plot-seize-crimea/26894212.html>. Coalson's assessment was that the annexation of Crimea was never an end in and of itself but that the action was part of a larger ongoing effort to destroy the Ukrainian state.

Federation.³⁶² When he finally acknowledged giving the invasion order (after a full year of evolving denial) Putin's revisionist time line placed the decision on the morning of February 23rd. Putin may have deliberated giving the execute order through the night of the 22nd, but Russian intelligence operatives and surrogates were clandestinely organizing across Crimea for at least several weeks prior to that date. If the specific annexation of Crimea was only a Kremlin contingency plan before the beginning of 2014, the continuous subversion of Ukraine in an effort to force Ukraine to accept Russian dominance was an ongoing strategic effort since the mid-2000s.³⁶³ Even as early as the mid-1990s the Russian policy regarding Ukraine appeared to be to "keep Kiev so weakened that it is unable to move away from Russia, but not so unstable that it becomes a massive security problem on Russia's western borders."³⁶⁴ The constant effort to undermine Kiev's independence through political warfare ultimately created the

³⁶² Andrei Lipsky, "It was Right to Initiate Accession of Eastern Regions of Ukraine to Russia," *Novaya Gazeta*, February 25, 2015, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/67389.html>. This memo was allegedly drafted by Russian Oligarch, Konstantin Malofeev, and sent to Putin as an internal "pragmatic" outline for the post-Euromaidan dissection of Ukraine. This outline cannot be ascribed to Putin directly, but given Putin's exclusion of divergent points of view from his circle of political advisors it is likely that this outline is a confirmation of sentiments generally held by Putin. The Russian government denies the authenticity of this memorandum, but it provides a pragmatic assessment of the Russian opportunities in Ukraine following the Euromaidan, particularly in establishing control over Crimea, absorbing the military-industrial capabilities of Ukraine's eastern oblasts (specifically Kharkiv and Donetsk and not Luhansk indicating it was created before the events in eastern Ukraine began to unfold), and opening the door for Slavic immigration into the Russian Federation. It contains specific guidance for the shaping of a pro-Russian narrative and an emphasis on using "legal" processes of referendums to promote first self-determination and then Russian integration by the inhabitants of the desired oblasts. This document also warns of the need to manipulate the international perception of the referendums by publishing videos of the voting process on the Internet.

³⁶³ Blank and Hussey, *The Truth about Ukraine*. Subversive measures to undermine Ukraine's general sovereignty were well underway by 2006, but if the steps toward annexation were initiated some eight years before the invasion, it would be expected that a more developed pro-Russian insurgent network would have been in place than what actually existed in early February 2014. With so little existing political support in the Crimean parliament, and the ad-hoc nature of the actual "self-defense forces" (not the Russian Army forces masquerading under the same name) at the time the occupation commenced, there was a significant potential for the effort to fail, particularly if the Ukrainian Army had started resisting with force. Ultimately the level of development was adequate, but a deliberate effort at moving toward annexation would have likely reduced some of the residual risk by developing more robust pro-Russian political and surrogate movements.

³⁶⁴ Ra'anani and Martin, *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?*, 192. Ra'anani and Martin assert that despite the clear indication of subversion, it was the practice of the Clinton administration to try to give Russia the benefit of the doubt and to offer explanations for Russian military action in several of the post-Soviet states as the work of rogue Russian military units, Russian soldiers acting as freelance mercenaries, and any number of other reasons despite clear indications that Yeltsin was directing the destabilizing actions, particularly in Abkhazia.

conditions for the rapid, relatively bloodless use of military force to seize and occupy the Crimean peninsula in early 2014.

Putin's first determined efforts to bring Ukraine under his direct influence began with the failed 2004 presidential election of Victor Yanukovich, the sitting Ukrainian Prime Minister and convicted felon from Donetsk. The 2004 election was a deliberate effort by Putin to "export 'managed democracy' next door."³⁶⁵ Through Russia's ambassador to Ukraine, Victor Chernomyrdin, "who clearly acted as if he was sent to be Moscow's proconsul in Kyiv like his tsarist and Soviet predecessors ... Moscow spent \$300 million to manipulate the outcome of the Ukrainian presidential election in 2004, showing again how little actual regard Moscow has for the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine."³⁶⁶ Yanukovich briefly won as the Party of Regions candidate with overwhelming support from the ethnically Russian dominated eastern regions of Ukraine. Charges of vote rigging and a possible attempted assassination-by-poisoning of opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko, led to widespread demonstrations which became the so-called "Orange Revolution," against the pro-Russian Yanukovich. The Ukrainian Supreme Court eventually annulled the election results following extensive allegations of voter fraud from numerous international observers and Yanukovich lost in a second run-off election.

In 2005, Yanukovich's Party of Regions created a political alliance with United Russia, the dominant Russian political party of Vladimir Putin.³⁶⁷ Despite Moscow's denial that Putin ever suggested the idea of dividing Ukraine between Russia and Poland to the Polish Prime Minister in 2008, that same year Russia blatantly violated Ukrainian

³⁶⁵ Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007), 375. Putin sent political advisors to assist Yanukovich and all of the efforts of state-controlled media and the security forces were employed to promote his candidacy, intimidate opponents and stuff ballot boxes. Unlike Russia, the existing ethno-linguistic divisions within Ukraine made democracy far less controllable.

³⁶⁶ Blank, *Russia and the Black Sea's Frozen Conflicts in Strategic Perspective*, 40.

³⁶⁷ "Party of Regions Hopes for Strengthening Collaboration with 'United Russia' Party," *Kyiv Post*, November 22, 2009, <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/party-of-regions-hopes-for-strengthening-collabora-53358.html>. See also: Andrew Jack, *Inside Putin's Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17. Jack describes *United Russia* as a reincarnation of the Communist Party, with ever increasing Soviet-era practices that promoted the efforts of the security services in controlling contact with foreign entities and extra-legal practices aimed at persecuting "spies" and other subversives.

sovereignty and international law when it took a page from the Georgia playbook and began issuing Russian passports to Russians in Crimea.³⁶⁸ When asked specifically if Crimea was Russia's next target after the invasion of Georgia, Putin demurred and stated that Russia recognized Ukraine's sovereignty and that Crimea was different because there was no ethnic conflict that required Russian intervention.³⁶⁹

Despite reports of voting irregularities yet again, the Russian-backed Yanukovich was elected and confirmed as President of Ukraine in 2010. Putin's support for Yanukovich might be easy to view as the patronage of a political ally, but Yanukovich's presidency marked a significant change in Ukraine's pro-Russian orientation which ultimately culminated with the Euromaidan protests in 2013. Shortly after being elected, Yanukovich reversed his predecessor's policies regarding the Black Sea Fleet and extended the Russian lease for an additional 25 years in exchange for subsidized Russian gas. He also filled the Ukrainian government with appointees from the eastern (Russian) oblasts who in turn helped him pass sweeping legislation which increased his power to quell political opposition. While Yanukovich publicly promised to seek an association with the EU, he was secretly signing a wide-reaching agreement for deeper economic ties with Russia. On November 21, 2014 Yanukovich's submission to Moscow's will became public when he announced that the EU association deal had been withdrawn.³⁷⁰ This sudden reversal touched off the Euromaidan protests that ultimately led to Yanukovich's ouster. In the wake of the killings of dozens of Euromaidan protestors, Putin's inner circle realized Yanukovich's grip on power was unrecoverable, and that there was little chance of a party emerging from the post-Euromaidan process who would be an acceptable "negotiating partner" for Russia.³⁷¹ The Russians also assessed that the

³⁶⁸ Adrian Blomfield, "Russia 'Distributing Passports in the Crimea,'" *The Telegraph*, August 17, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/2575421/Russia-distributing-passports-in-the-Crimea.html>.

³⁶⁹ "Putin's 2008 Comments on Crimea, before a Sharp Change of Tack." *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (Original Interview from ARD Television)*, April 07, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/media/video/putin-crimea-ukraine/26942862.html>.

³⁷⁰ Katya Gorchinskaya and James Marson, "Ukrainians Protest Snubbing of EU Trade Deal," *Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304465604579217952059663052>.

³⁷¹ Lipsky, *It was Right to Initiate Accession of Eastern Regions of Ukraine to Russia*.

Ukrainian defense establishment was paralyzed as the entire status of the country's leadership became questionable.

A key to the successful Crimean operation would be the lack of effective resistance on the part of Ukrainian defense forces based there. If any had fought back, Russia's narrative of a bloodless, popular transfer of administrative control would have been lost. Well in advance of the annexation, Russia exploited the culture of endemic corruption and divergent sense of ethnic and national loyalties throughout Ukraine to buy the allegiance of those in the position to resist. Ukrainian army generals, intelligence officers, and police officers were recruited by the Russian intelligence service and at the critical moment either defected to the invading Russian side or chose to keep their units out of direct confrontation.³⁷² A significant psychological blow for the emerging Ukrainian government and its strained relationship with the military was the public defection of Ukrainian Navy Admiral Denis Berezovsky to the self-proclaimed government of Crimea.³⁷³ Russia also enjoyed a significant advantage in situational awareness as well as a commensurate ability to keep the new Ukrainian government in the dark due to the extensive penetration of the Ukrainian Intelligence Service (SBU) by the Russian FSB.³⁷⁴ As Russian forces and surrogates began occupying Crimean administrative centers and surrounding Ukrainian military bases, Moscow unleashed a

³⁷² Nemtsov, *Putin. War*, 5. The level of Ukrainian defections is disputed. Some Ukrainian leadership was without question compromised by Russian intelligence. However, without clear orders from Kiev or a clear understanding of the situation, most of the officers in charge of Ukrainian garrisons on Crimea probably acted prudently in attempting to reduce the potential for violence. FSB COL Igor (Strelkov) Girkin claimed that there were very few defections from the Army. The Ukrainian Berkut on the other hand, defected almost en masse, which is indicative of the level of Russian control that existed in the organization prior to the Euromaidan. See also: Howard and Pukhov, 2014, for an assessment of the numbers of defections at different points of the occupation. Ultimately Putin signed an order that allowed any Ukrainian military member to maintain his rank, housing and family benefits in the Russian military if they agreed to switch sides. Howard and Pukhov estimate that around 9000 Ukrainian service men ultimately took Putin up on the offer and changed sides.

³⁷³ Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, eds., *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2014), 167. Berezovsky attempted to encourage other Ukrainian sailors and vessels to defect and was largely ignored. He was instrumental in getting several of the blockaded Ukrainian vessels to eventually surrender to the Russians and after the annexation, Putin appointed Berezovsky as the deputy commander of the Black Sea Fleet.

³⁷⁴ Mark Galeotti, "Moscow's Spy Game: Why Russia is Winning the Intelligence War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs* (October 30, 2014).

wave of disinformation and propaganda that denied any Russian military involvement in Crimea, and portrayed the Euromaidan as a Neo-Nazi junta that would persecute ethnic Russians, resurrecting cultural fears from World War II. These messages were coupled with propaganda promoting Russian identity, Crimea's historic position as a Russian province, and the perception that Russian citizens were supportive of Crimea breaking away from Ukraine.

Putin himself was part of the disinformation campaign. His outright denial that Russia was involved in the ongoing occupation was eventually replaced with an admission that Russia had in fact conduct the operation, but only out of concern that the people on Crimea were in need of protection.

No. [The seizing of Crimea] had not been pre-planned or prepared. It was done on the spot, and we had to play it by ear based on the situation and the demands at hand. But it was all performed promptly and professionally, I have to give you that.

Our task was not to conduct a full-fledged military operation there, but it was to ensure people's safety and security and a comfortable environment to express their will. We did that. But it would not have been possible without the Crimeans' own strong resolution.

Also, I must say that I didn't add the concluding line to my Kremlin speech about initiating a draft law on the inclusion of Crimea in the Russian Federation- until the very last day, last moment, because I was waiting for the referendum results. Polls and surveys are one thing, along with certain groups' sentiments, but a referendum is the expression of the will of all the residents of an area. It was very important for me to know what their will was.

So when the voter turnout reached 83 percent and more than 96 percent supported Crimea's inclusion in the Russian Federation, it became obvious that this decision was made by the majority, if not unanimously. In this situation, we couldn't have done otherwise.³⁷⁵

The appearance of legitimacy through democratic processes is an important part of Putin's effort to present his hybrid campaign as self-determination and not overt subjugation. The Russians frequently cite the referendum for Kosovo's independence as

³⁷⁵ Kremlin.ru, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*

the Western precedent for the process, despite Kosovo's breakaway from Serbia coming on the heels of genocide and no comparable conditions existing in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea or Eastern Ukraine, let alone the fact that the Kosovo referendum was widely monitored by impartial observers and established independence, not annexation by a foreign sponsor. Legitimacy through "popular referendum" was so central to the Russian plan that the Crimean Parliament building was among the first targets captured by Russian Spetsnaz, where those same forces were able to quickly orchestrate a quorum and install a proxy civilian leader who would then petition Russia for further military intervention.³⁷⁶ In addition to the appearance of legitimacy through managed democracy, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu attempted to portray the intervention as a legitimate defensive measure, necessary to protect Russian military personnel and property in Crimea from attack by undefined extremist organizations.³⁷⁷

Russia also employed a variety of state and non-attributable entities to conduct different degrees of cyber-warfare against Ukraine. As early as 2010, Ukrainian cyber security personnel identified malicious code named "Uroburos" on Ukrainian government computer systems that appeared to be part of a widespread Russian cyber campaign known as "Snake."³⁷⁸ Instances of this infection were reported in several other countries over the next four years but Ukraine was by far the most heavily targeted.³⁷⁹ Uroburos appears to have been used primarily to spy on Ukrainian government communications, but it also had the capability to take control of computers and shut down information systems.³⁸⁰ In at least one instance, Russian Special Forces were used to facilitate cellular network monitoring and disruption. On February 28, 2014, after

³⁷⁶ Alissa de Carbonnel, "Insight - how the Separatists Delivered Crimea to Moscow," *Reuters*, March 12, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/12/ukraine-crisis-russia-aksyonov-idUSL6N0M81Q720140312>.

³⁷⁷ Roy Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1263. Allison provides a very thorough analysis of the various international and domestic legalisms that Russia attempted to manipulate to provide the appearance of legal justification for its actions in Ukraine.

³⁷⁸ *Snake Rootkit Report* (Guildford England: BAE Systems Applied Intelligence, 2014), http://info.baesystemsdetica.com/rs/baesystems/images/snake_whitepaper.pdf.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸⁰ "Russian Cyber Attacks on Ukraine: The Georgia Template." Channel4.com, May 03, 2014, <http://www.channel4.com/news/ukraine-cyber-warfare-russia-attacks-georgia>.

Russian forces seized key Crimean facilities, the mobile service provider Ukrtelecom confirmed that its facilities in Crimea had been raided and that the intruders had tampered with fiber optic cables and disrupted local communications. The Crimean Ukrtelecom facility was then identified as the point of origin for denial of service attacks directed at the cellular telephones of members of the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev.³⁸¹

Using a now familiar mix of non-attributable government cyber security organizations and independent hackers, Russia conducted botnet and DDoS attacks against Ukraine in March 2014, peaking in late March in the run-up to the referendum.³⁸² The scale and impact of cyber-attacks remained relatively low during the Crimean annexation however, considering Russia's known cyber-warfare capabilities. One possible explanation for the low-level of cyber-attacks is the high level of network interdependence between Russia and Ukraine. Widespread viral contamination and denial of service attacks would have heavily affected Russia's own network services. The attacks that were carried out achieved some level of disruption, but they were limited in scope because the Russians simply didn't need to create a more destructive effect to achieve their objectives, preferring instead to keep the cyber infrastructure open in order to deliver their propaganda.³⁸³

D. NON-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: TRADE AND MEDIA/PROPAGANDA WARFARE

When Western leaders prepared to meet with Eastern European leaders in Vilnius, Lithuania in late 2013, the economic cooperation summit was subsumed by Yanukovych's refusal to sign the EU partnership deal and the protests in Kiev. Moscow ensured that Yanukovych and the Ukrainian parliament understood that Russia would inflict hardship if Ukraine backed out of its new agreement for economic cooperation

³⁸¹ "Ukraine Suspects Russia as Source of Cyber Attack on MPs." Channel4.com, March 05, 2014, <http://www.channel4.com/news/russia-ukraine-cyber-attacks-crimea-mps-phones-Internet>.

³⁸² Russell Brandom, "Cyberattacks Spiked as Russia Annexed Crimea," The Verge, May 29, 2014, <http://www.theverge.com/2014/5/29/5759138/malware-activity-spiked-as-russia-annexed-crimea>.

³⁸³ Jeremy Hsu, "Why there's no Real Cyberwar in the Ukraine Conflict," IEEE Spectrum, March 14, 2014, <http://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/computing/networks/why-theres-no-real-cyberwar-in-the-ukraine-conflict>

with Russia. “As the Vilnius summit neared, Moscow imposed trade embargoes on various Ukrainian exports to Russia.”³⁸⁴ Ukraine is heavily dependent on Russian natural gas for heat. This gas is delivered through the same pipelines that supply almost 80 percent of Russian gas exports to Europe. “Russia wants control over this infrastructure because it can’t use gas as a lever against Ukraine without affecting the other downstream customers in Europe. The European mediated resolution to the first gas war of 2006 was extremely unpopular in Ukraine, and within a week of its signing, the Ukrainian government collapsed following heavy domestic criticism.”³⁸⁵ The repeated actions of threatening and actually shutting off gas supplies by the Russian state-controlled Gazprom were not wholly about price or payment disagreements. These actions were leverage for Moscow’s control over political activity in Kiev.³⁸⁶ The fact that threats about the gas supply are only made in the middle of winter, when people will start freezing to death and will quickly rally to whatever government turns the heat on, is an example of the weaponization of economic interdependence.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to offer loans and to subsidize Ukrainian gas prices at rates that were too good for the Ukrainians to pass up. This fostering of dependency kept Ukraine from aggressively developing alternative forms of energy and made the political establishment subject to Moscow’s dictates as Gazprom demanded payments, raised rates, or shut off services in the coldest parts of the year. This process continued through the election of Victor Yanukovych whose pro-

³⁸⁴ Hill and Pifer, *Putin’s Russia Goes Rogue*. In January 2014, Hill and Pifer projected that Russia would use energy and subsidies for leverage in Ukraine, but that the Russians might make a determined effort to undermine the Ukrainian government by making use of ethnic divisions, promoting violent confrontations with state authorities in Crimea to create a reason for Russian “defensive” intervention.

³⁸⁵ Bertil Nygrin, “Russian Resource Policies towards the CIS Countries,” in *Russia and its Near Neighbours: Identity, Interests and Foreign Policy*, eds. Maria R. Friere and Roger E. Kanet (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 224.

³⁸⁶ Chloe Arnold, “Barring ‘Obstacles,’ Russia Ready to Resume Gas Shipments,” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, December 01, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_Says_Ukraine_Signs_New_Gas_Monitoring_Deal_/1368899.html.

Russian orientation was hoped would bring more considerate treatment from Russia.³⁸⁷ Through Yanukovych, Putin was able to secure an extension for the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol through 2042 and a promise that Ukraine would not join NATO in exchange for a 30 percent subsidy of Ukrainian gas prices.³⁸⁸ While not specified on Callard and Faber's matrix of the forms of war, "dependency warfare" might be a useful distinction for the amount of leverage gained by subsidizing a target state as opposed to more direct methods of financial warfare.

Russian propaganda efforts since the beginning of the Euromaidan represent one of the more remarkable manifestations of Russian hybrid warfare. Instead of merely trying to curb free-speech domestically (although that practice has also been widely resurrected), Russia has "weaponized" the instruments of free speech to "confuse, blackmail, demoralize, subvert, and paralyze" its immediate Ukrainian victims and the international community.³⁸⁹ Russia's practices turn the fundamental institutions of liberal societies, namely the free-press, into vectors for propaganda attack in the form of government sponsored press, publication of "academic" articles and editorials and the mass use of social media from official sources and an army of "trolls" who flood discussion forums with a pro-Moscow message. On September 11, 2013, Putin used an American public relations firm to craft a full page opinion-editorial in the New York Times to call for the American people to challenge President Obama's plan to attack Syria, citing instead all of the international standards for conflict resolution, illegitimacy for the use of force against a sovereign nation, and specifically casting doubt about the Syrian origin of the chemical attack that had demanded a response in the first place.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Nygrin, *Russian Resource Policies Towards the CIS Countries*, 227. See also: Vladislav Inozemtsev, "Moscow's New Best Friend," *Moscow Times*, May 05, 2010, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/moscows-new-best-friend/405389.html>; Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Cuts off Gas to Ukraine in Cost Dispute," *New York Times*, January 02, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/02/international/europe/02russia.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&.

³⁸⁸ Nygrin, *Russian Resource Policies towards the CIS Countries*, 227.

³⁸⁹ Pomerantsev and Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, 4.

³⁹⁰ Vladimir Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," *New York Times*, September 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0. The publication on September 11th was also very intentional and meant to highlight what Putin frames as America's failed post-9/11 policies.

To Obama's detractors and peace-activists alike, Putin suddenly became a reasonable voice of restraint, a "moderate" who could be a useful ally in ending the use of chemical weapons in Syria. This same moderate would complete the invasion and annexation of Crimea less than six months later. During the Soviet era, KGB propaganda efforts like the intentional American design of the AIDS virus or the CIA's involvement with the Kennedy assassination were carefully planted in foreign news outlets to conceal their origin. In 2014, the Kremlin had an English-language Russian government sponsored news channel, Russia Today (RT), carried as part of many basic cable packages and available in the living rooms of millions of Western households, as well as a related Internet "news" channel that bills itself as an alternative to the Western mainstream media. "The effect is not to persuade (as in classic public diplomacy) or earn credibility but to sow confusion via conspiracy theories and proliferate falsehoods."³⁹¹ The Euromaidan protests in Kiev in late 2013 were also accompanied by a dramatic change in the nature of the Russian propaganda. The anti-Yanukovych protestors demanding European integration and market reforms were suddenly cast as fascists, neo-Nazis, "Banderites" and puppets of Western intelligence manipulation.³⁹²

E. MILITARY FORMS OF WAR

Following the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia and the suspension of the NATO membership process for Georgia and Ukraine, Ukraine had to consider the possibility of having to unilaterally resist a Russian incursion on Ukrainian territory. Unfortunately, with funds just barely adequate for keeping its soldiers paid, there was no possibility of paying to move the garrisons from their former westward Soviet-era orientation, to positions closer to the Russian border. A 2008 readiness inspection revealed that "only 31 of Ukraine's 112 fighter jets, 10 of its bombers, and eight of its 36 attack aircraft were operational."³⁹³ When the 2008 world financial crisis dragged down government budgets

³⁹¹ Pomerantsev and Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, 6.

³⁹² Associated Press, "Russian Propaganda War in Full Swing Over Ukraine," *Haaretz*, March 15, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/1.579964>.

³⁹³ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 63.

around the globe, Ukraine was no exception; the already marginal Ukrainian defense budget shrank even further. Despite modest increases in defense spending in 2012–2013, Victor Yanukovych undermined national confidence in the Army when he attempted to deploy soldiers to Kiev to end the Euromaidan protest.³⁹⁴ The friction between civilians and the Army, and the Army's slowness to act on behalf of the new government when Yanukovych was overthrown, contributed to the lack of clear orders for the defense of Crimea when the Ukrainians still had a numerical advantage and might have resisted the occupation.³⁹⁵

In Crimea, Russia accomplished the traditional military objectives of seizing key objectives, encircling enemy forces, and controlling the population, through a non-traditional mixture of intelligence officers, Spetsnaz, elite airborne and marine forces, irregular militia, private security organizations, volunteers, and criminal groups as the vanguard for a follow-on conventional occupation force. The nature and composition of these elements has been the object of most of the Western speculation regarding hybrid warfare that developed in the wake of the occupation. These combinations are interesting from the perspective of organization, coordination, and non-attribution, but they are not without precedent in the chronicles of military history. To focus too narrowly on the nature of the forces involved in the occupation is to miss the fact that the annexation of Crimea was only a single dramatic moment in a larger Russian hybrid war against Ukraine. Without this context, the Crimea operation is remarkable only for its lack of violence and for the length of time that Russia continued to deny any and all involvement. Because the annexation was the product of a larger hybrid effort however, it is valuable to examine the nature of the military forms of war that were employed there.

For more than a year prior to the Crimean annexation, Russia executed a series of large scale military exercises in the Black Sea region to “test the readiness” of the Russian fleet and other regional forces.³⁹⁶ Larger and larger exercises were also held

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 69.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 69.

³⁹⁶ “Russia Military Exercises 2013: Large-Scale, Surprise Drills in Black Sea Region Announced,” *World Post*, 28 March, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/28/russia-military-exercises-2013_n_2970184.html.

throughout Russia during 2013.³⁹⁷ Major security exercises and troop deployments to the Black Sea region were attributed to the security precautions being taken for the Sochi Olympics until the first suspected Russian soldiers and vehicles were reported in Crimea. These exercises served to desensitize observers to the potential danger, and to provide a plausible excuse for the Russians to activate their reserve units and undertake the lengthy process of moving men and equipment via rail to different locations in the Federation.

Weeks before the culmination of the Euromaidan and before Putin's acknowledged timeline for his decision to take Crimea, critical actions for the annexation were already taking place in Crimea. In early February 2014, Putin's former Deputy Prime Minister, Vladislav Surkov,³⁹⁸ suddenly appeared in Simferopol to speak with Crimean leaders about autonomy and to propose a bridge across the Kerch Strait that would link Crimea directly to the Russian mainland.³⁹⁹ Surkov, also a former KGB officer, meant for the bridge project to serve as a cover for an influx of Russians and equipment, and to serve as an investment that would need to be protected with additional military assets if the Ukrainian security situation were to become questionable.⁴⁰⁰ Throughout February, thousands of Russian soldiers and "volunteers" were secretly staged on Russia's existing Crimean military bases.⁴⁰¹ Not only did the use of these bases for combat staging violate Russia's treaties with Ukraine, but they very likely

³⁹⁷ "Bear out of Hibernation or did the Russian Train Leave 12 Months Ago." Recorded Future, 31 March, 2014, <https://www.recordedfuture.com/russian-military-activity/>.

³⁹⁸ Jack, *Inside Putin's Russia*, 328. Surkov was originally appointed to the Kremlin by the oil oligarchs. He rapidly became one of Putin's principle advisors and is considered one of the main architects of Putin's so-called "managed democracy." Surkov was also a principle driver of Putin's image projection as a reformer while Putin was actually consolidating his authoritarian grip on power. Surkov played a key role in eliminating political opposition to Chechen leader, Akhmad Kadyrov, ensuring that Putin's preferred choice would win the election that brought a favorable outcome to Moscow for an end to the Second Chechen War. See also: Baker and Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*, 270, 300–301.

³⁹⁹ Paul Goble, *No Longer a Question--'Russia has opened a Crimean Front'*. Window on Eurasia. 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140303013733/http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2014/02/window-on-eurasia-no-longer-question.html>. This article mistakenly calls him "Vladimir" Surkov. As the issuing of passports to citizens of another country is a violation of sovereignty, a similar disregard for a nation's control over its own territory is demonstrated by the representative of a foreign government meeting with the residents of a particular area to discuss creating a physical link between the two entities.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ John Simpson, "Russia's Crimea Plan Detailed, Secret, and Successful," *BBC News*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26644082>.

provided the Spetsnaz and FSB with an opportunity to move among the civilian population and conduct close reconnaissance of certain objectives as well as to coordinate with local separatists during the invasion's final planning stages.

In mid-February 2014, Crimean observers were still discounting the possibility of a popular movement paving the way for Russian military deployment on the peninsula based on the lack of significant pro-Russian sentiment.⁴⁰² There had been “anti-Euromaidan” protests in the heavily Russian cities of Simferopol and Sevastopol, but the majority of the population was largely apathetic to the events in Kiev. While there were neo-Soviets, Cossacks, Russian biker gangs, and other Russian fringe elements who could be used as Russian proxies, the lack of underlying ethnic tensions and the weak representation of pro-Russian unification political groups in the Crimean parliament created doubt that an adequate pretext for Russian intervention was possible in the near future.⁴⁰³ This observation demonstrates the lack of home-grown Crimean separatist sentiment that existed just days before the occupation began, and it is indicative of the limited surrogate mobilization in the direction of annexation that had been done prior to the beginning of 2014.

As the Euromaidan protests in Kiev approached their climax in late January, a little known, pro-Russian politician in Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, began organizing hundreds of ethnic Russians in Crimea to form a pro-Russian militia.⁴⁰⁴ Prior to his obscure role in politics, Aksyonov had an extensive network of criminal associates from his time as a mid-level enforcer in the Crimean mafia and his network of less than completely legitimate businesses.⁴⁰⁵ These connections enabled him to draw upon the

⁴⁰² Mat Babiak, “Is Russia opening a ‘Crimean Front’?” *Ukrainian Policy* (February 21, 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140221171849/http://ukrainianpolicy.com/is-russia-opening-a-crimean-front/>.

⁴⁰³ Babiak, “Is Russia opening a ‘Crimean Front’?”

⁴⁰⁴ Simon Shuster, “Putin’s Man in Crimea is Ukraine’s Worst Nightmare,” *TIME*, March 10, 2014, <http://time.com/19097/putin-crimea-russia-ukraine-aksyonov/>. Aksyonov was a representative of the “Russian Unity” Party, a fringe political movement that promoted unification of Crimea with Russia. Before the annexation, the Unity Party held only three out of one hundred seats in the Crimean legislature and none at the lower governmental levels, indicating how little existing popularity for annexation there actually was.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

pro-Russian criminal element to fill out the ranks of his so-called “self-defense forces.” By the time Yanukovych abandoned the Ukrainian presidency, Aksyonov’s militia numbered several thousand.⁴⁰⁶

On February 22, Victor Yanukovych fled Kiev.⁴⁰⁷ Four days later, Russian “separatists” and “volunteers” established checkpoints to restrict access to the Crimean capital of Simferopol as Putin ordered a large-scale military drill along the Ukrainian border.⁴⁰⁸ This force of 150,000 Russian troops were supposedly ordered to conduct a “snap” readiness exercise,⁴⁰⁹ but the time needed to muster and transport that many troops means that the actual order was likely given weeks earlier. The presence and uncertain intentions of such a large force caused the three-day-old interim government in Kiev to have to consider a Russian move against the Ukrainian capital, further degrading Kiev’s ability to respond to the unclear reports of armed “little green men” appearing in Crimea. Amid the uncertainty about Russian intentions and what the appropriate Ukrainian and international positions should be, non-attributable Russian Special Forces slipped off of the Russian bases in Crimea and began to capture key objectives while Russian intelligence officers employed the “self-defense forces” to present the appearance that a popular local movement was undermining Kiev’s control of the peninsula.⁴¹⁰

On Feb 27, 2014, several dozen heavily armed self-described “Crimean self-defense forces” seized the Crimean parliament and several government administrative buildings, while taking care not to harm the security guards. These troops, obviously better trained and equipped than a month-old militia and eventually confirmed as the first

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Niklas Granholm et al., *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine* (Stockholm, Sweden: FOIR, 2014), 41.

⁴⁰⁸ Mark MacKinnon, “Russian-Backed Fighters Restrict Access to Crimean City,” *Globe and Mail*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/tension-in-crimea-as-pro-russia-and-pro-ukraine-groups-stage-competing-rallies/article17110382/#dashboard/follows/?cmpid=tgc>.

⁴⁰⁹ James G. Neuger, “NATO Urges Intact Ukraine as Russia Holds Army Exercise,” *Bloomberg*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-26/nato-urges-intact-ukraine-as-russia-holds-military-drill>.

⁴¹⁰ Granholm et al., *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine*, 41.

wave of Putin's "polite people" (Russian Spetsnaz), secured the Parliament while Aksyonov began rounding up enough parliament members to reach a quorum.⁴¹¹ Aksyonov's assembly then voted under the watchful eyes of the pro-Russian forces and elected Aksyonov as the Prime Minister of Crimea, before voting to hold a referendum on secession from Ukraine. Aksyonov immediately appealed to Vladimir Putin for Russian intervention in Crimea, providing "legitimacy" for the introduction of large numbers of Russian forces.

The organization of the "self-defense forces" was also not left solely to locals like Aksyonov. In an interview almost a year later, Russian FSB Colonel Igor "Strelkov" Girkin claimed he was in Crimea on 21 Feb 2014 (before the date of Putin's decision) organizing the militia.⁴¹² While he maintained the narrative of "siding with the population" to imply that unification with Russia had popular support, Strelkov claimed that the Berkut was the only Ukrainian force that openly sided with the pro-Russian movement. Contrary to propaganda reports of massive Ukrainian defections, Strelkov insists that the Ukrainian police and army never broke faith with Kiev. Strelkov also confirmed that the referendum was carefully orchestrated by the pro-Russian militants, under the command of FSB officers, who gathered members of parliament and forced them to vote for the Russian Unity Party and for the pro-Russian referendum. Guaranteeing Russia's preferred outcome from the vote was still only possible due to the

⁴¹¹ Shuster, *Putin's Man in Crimea is Ukraine's Worst Nightmare*. There are several surveillance videos of the "little green men" storming what has been confirmed to be the Crimean Parliament building. Putin's eventual acknowledgement that Russian Special Forces were involved in the Crimean operation, the political importance of the target and the need for the operation to be as bloodless as possible, the standardized uniforms, equipment and professional demeanor, leave little doubt that this operation was conducted by professional Russian soldiers. The quorum and vote to proceed with a referendum were also highly controlled. No press were allowed to observe the proceedings, several members of parliament were threatened with violence if they did not vote for Aksyonov and the referendum, and one MP claimed a vote was cast in his name even though he was not in Simferopol at all.

⁴¹² "Moscow Agent Strelkov Admits Russian Army Behind Crimean Referendum." *Ukraine Today*, January 25, 2015, <http://uatoday.tv/news/moscow-agent-strelkov-admits-russian-army-behind-crimean-referendum-404995.html>. See also: "Russian Colonel: Crimea Referendum Was Fake," YouTube video, from the Russian interview titled: И.Стрелков Vs Н.Стариков "ЦЕНТРСИЛЫ / СИЛАЦЕНТРА" [I. Strelkov vs. N. Starikov "CENTRSILY/ SILACENTRA"], aired originally on the Russian program: POLIT-RING on Нейромип-ТВ, posted with English subtitles by "EMPR," January 22, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcCqrzctxH4>. The FSB is the Russian intelligence service and successor to the KGB.

visible presence of Russian armored vehicles on the streets of Simferopol.⁴¹³ By 28 February the pro-Russians had sealed off the Armyansk and Chongar roads that connect Crimea to the Ukrainian mainland and were carefully preventing foreign press and Ukrainian militia from reaching the peninsula.⁴¹⁴

In addition to Cossacks from Russia-proper and local Russian biker gangs, the Crimean “self-defense forces” also incorporated Russo-Ukrainian security professionals. Russian private security companies and members of the Ukrainian Berkut (the Special Police and “titushky” who were dissolved after the bloodshed in Kiev during the Euromaidan) were absorbed into the ranks of the Crimean separatist forces to provide manpower to the core of GRU, FSB and Spetsnaz operators.⁴¹⁵ By March 11th, conventional Russian artillery units were reported to be positioned on Crimea while Russian MI-8 and MI-24 helicopters delivered reinforcements to Russian controlled airfields.⁴¹⁶ Two weeks after the seizing of the Crimean parliament, over 20,000 Russian soldiers were occupying Crimea, supported by an unknown number of local militia.⁴¹⁷

Through the manipulated referendum process, Crimea declared independence and petitioned Russia for accession on March 16th. The Russian Duma amended the Russian

⁴¹³ Ibid. Strelkov believed the lack of a visible Russian presence in Donbas when the referendum was attempted there, gave room for pro-Ukrainian forces to demonstrate that support for Russia was not overwhelming. Strelkov’s claim is meant to be critical of Moscow for not planning for adequate support for the operation, but it is also illuminating as to the low-level of existing local support for a “separatist” movement.

⁴¹⁴ Simpson, *Russia’s Crimea Plan Detailed, Secret, and Successful*.

⁴¹⁵ Maksym Bugriy, “The Crimean Operation” Russian Force and Tactics,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 61 (April 01, 2014), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42164&no_cache=1#.ViLYunbn-Ul. The “titushky” are criminals and local thugs drafted into service in the Berkut when a heavy hand is needed to put down a protest. Their lack of restraint made them particularly brutal during actions like riot control and they are blamed for much of the bloodshed during the Euromaidan. The Berkut were blamed for the shootings of the protesters in the last days of the movement and were immediately disbanded by the interim government. There are claims that the Berkut were heavily manned with pro-Russian nationalists and FSB agents. Several of the Berkut’s senior leaders have been indicted by Ukrainian courts for the actions during the Maidan, but all of the organization’s members fled Kiev for either Crimea, where they joined the “self-defense forces,” or to Russia proper to avoid criminal prosecution.

⁴¹⁶ “In the Area of Perekop Delivered 22 Russian Artillery Units.” *Black Sea News*, March 11, 2014, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/77613>.

⁴¹⁷ Carol Morello, Pamela Constable and Anthony Faiola, “Crimeans Vote to break away from Ukraine, join Russia,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2014/03/16/cccec2132-acd4-11e3-a06a-e3230a43d6cb_story.html.

Constitution to accept Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol as part of the Russian Federation two days later. Russia publicly claims the referendum saw an 83 percent voter turnout of whom 97 percent voted for joining Russia.⁴¹⁸ An official Russian finding on the referendum later confirmed that the actual results were closer to 15–25 percent voting to join Russia with less than half of voters turning out to the polls.⁴¹⁹ Remaining a part of Ukraine was not a ballot option.

For the next two weeks the remaining Ukrainian garrisons were forced to surrender while thousands of Russian reinforcements were ferried across the Kerch Straight or airlifted into the airports.⁴²⁰ Signaling the end of the self-defense forces' usefulness and leaving little doubt regarding who was now in charge of Crimea, "Putin ordered the Crimean "self-defense forces" to integrate into the Russian military and security forces on March 25th."⁴²¹ The publicized images of the operation, particularly of the "polite-people/ little green men," are also part of a deliberate Russian effort to shape the perceptions of Russian military capability. The Russian forces' image was carefully crafted to imply that all of the occupation forces were outfitted with the latest AK-74 rifles, electronic sites, communications gear, night vision equipment, and body armor while riding into action in the latest generation of tanks, armored personnel carriers

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Yevgeny Bobrov, "Проблемы Жителей Крыма (the Problems of the Crimean Residents)," *Council under the President of the Russian Federation on the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights*, April 22, 2014. See also: Paul R. Gregory, "Putin's 'Human Rights Council' Accidentally Posts Real Crimean Election Results," *Forbes.Com*, May 5, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/05/putins-human-rights-council-accidentally-posts-real-crimean-election-results-only-15-voted-for-annexation/>. The relevant text follows (translated with MS Bing): "According to almost all of the surveyed experts and citizens:-the overwhelming majority of the people voted in a referendum for Sevastopol joining Russia (50-80 percent) voter turnout, according to various sources for joining Russia voted 50–60 percent of voters with a total turnout of 30–50 percent; residents of Crimea voted not so much for joining Russia, but for the termination, in their words, "corruption and lawlessness vorovskogo [criminal syndicate] dominance [of] Donetsk henchmen. Residents of Sevastopol voted for accession to Russia. Fear [of] the illegal armed groups in Sevastopol was greater than in other parts of the Crimea." So the irony is that even of the 15–30 percent of Crimeans who actually voted for unifying with Russia (not counting Sevastopol which did appear to get a majority), a major motivating factor was disgust with the (pro-Russian, Donetsk origin) Yanukovich regime. Sevastopol did vote to unify with Russia, but was heavily influenced to do so by Russian propaganda. In this same document, the Russian 'Human Rights Group' discusses getting rid of banned (in Russia) subversive Islamic texts that were not outlawed under Ukraine.

⁴²⁰ Granholm et al., *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression Towards Ukraine*, 41

⁴²¹ Bugriy, *The Crimean Operation" Russian Force and Tactics*

and helicopters.⁴²² Videos of disciplined soldiers marching in formation and reports of generally respectful demeanor toward civilians and Ukrainian military personnel were also part of this carefully manufactured image. On March 26th, General Gerasimov issued a press release claiming that Russian flags were flying over all 193 Ukrainian military facilities in Crimea and that all Ukrainian servicemen wishing to remain in the service of Ukraine were in the process of being repatriated to the mainland.⁴²³

Hybrid warfare does not end with the establishment of “peace” following the dynamic change in the political status quo. The most damaging thing for Russia’s new hold over Crimea would be a challenge to its “will of the people” narrative in the form of an emerging resistance to the Russian occupation. To prevent this, Russian forces had to enforce population control measures to restrict civilian movement on the peninsula while the state security services arrested political dissidents and restrict online sources of information. Well after the annexation, Russian Special Forces were still being used to exert control over potentially divisive elements on the peninsula. On January 26th, 2015, Russian security forces seized the Crimean Tatar language television station, demanding archived footage of an anti-annexation demonstration held in Simferopol on February 26th.⁴²⁴ On March 31st, 2015, the Tatar language ATR and several Tatar radio and children’s programming stations were taken off air for failing to meet new Russian licensing requirements.⁴²⁵ Several leading Tatar community leaders have been expelled

⁴²² Rowan Scarborough, “Tactical Advantage: Russian Military shows off Impressive New Gear,” *Washington Times*, April 20, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/apr/20/tactical-advantage-russian-military-shows-off-impr/?page=all>. This article describes the sophistication of Russian equipment and the mismatch faced by the vastly under-equipped Ukrainian Army as a product of the post-2008 Russian Army transformation. In the same article retired U.S. Army MG Robert Scales cautions against assuming that the entire Russian Army has been similarly equipped and trained in the same period of time. He estimates that there are about 30,000 Russian troops in the Spetsnaz, Airborne and Naval Infantry forces who have been modernized as part of the transformation.

⁴²³ “Valery Gerasimov Explained the Procedure for Export of Ukrainian Troops from the Territory of the Republic of Crimea,” *Arms-Expo.Ru*, March 26, 2014, http://www.arms-expo.ru/news/politics_and_society/valeriy-gerasimov-raz-yasnil-poryadok-vyvoza-ukrainskih-voennosluhaschih-s-territorii-respubliki-krym26-03-2014-14-51-00/.

⁴²⁴ Gabriela Baczyńska, “Russia raids Tatar TV in Crimea, Drawing OSCE Criticism,” *Reuters*, January 26, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/26/ukraine-crisis-crimea-tv-idUSL6N0V52E320150126>.

⁴²⁵ Vitaly Shevchenko, “Crimean Tatar Media ‘Silenced by Russia,’” *BBC*, April 01, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32145218>.

from Crimea while rank-and-file Tatar activists have been assaulted or have simply “disappeared.”⁴²⁶ By mid-February 2015, there were 29,400 Russian troops in Crimea.⁴²⁷

F. CONCLUSION

The annexation of Crimea was a shock to the Western sense of international order and forced NATO members and non-members alike to evaluate their organic and mutual preparations for defense as well as their respective vulnerabilities to a surrogate “uprising” being used to mask an invasion. As clever as the operation was, it was neither inevitable nor guaranteed to succeed. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has not tried to hide its efforts to maintain a dominant relationship with Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea only represents a single, tangible manifestation of the decades-long hybrid campaign to force Kiev to accept Moscow’s domination. Through subversion of the political process to play king-maker, subsidizing energy resources to foster dependence, and the exploitation of divisive propaganda to attempt to keep Ukraine’s Russian population oriented toward Moscow, Russia has engaged in political warfare to weaken Ukraine’s ability to resist aggression unilaterally or by joining other economic or defensive associations. Political warfare efforts became hybrid when Russia employed a variety of the military forms of war to manufacture the appearance of a popular movement and to give Putin the slightest degree of legitimacy during the façade of a democratic change of government and the subsequent referendum on Crimea. Through layers of deception and a concerted effort to increase the Ukrainian military’s level of uncertainty, Russia was able to present the world with a *fait accompli* after three weeks of relatively bloodless effort. What is most remarkable, given how effortless the capture of Crimea seemed, was how poorly prepared the peninsula actually was when the operation began.

At the time Aksyonov and the FSB manufactured his quorum, his Russia Unity Party had only 3 percent of the seats in the Crimean parliament. The Party of Regions,

⁴²⁶ Shevchenko, “Crimean Tatar Media ‘Silenced by Russia.’”

⁴²⁷ Reuben F. Johnson, “Update: Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine ‘is Working,’” *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly* (February 26, 2015).

Yanukovych's party with strong ties to Putin's United Russia, held 80 percent of the seats in Crimea, but there was very little momentum to vote for succession from Ukraine. The vote still had to be held under armed guard and in secret with some very dubious ballots cast. If the annexation of Crimea had been a deliberate objective prior to 2014, it would be expected that political support for that end would have been more thoroughly prepared. Similarly, the degree to which Aksyonov and others would have been allowed to draw manpower from their criminal associates and the *titushky* would have also been minimized in order to ensure the application of violence could be closely controlled. Ultimately, the process worked well, and Moscow may have drawn some erroneous conclusions regarding the level of pro-Russian sentiment there actually was in Ukraine or how easily the process might be replicated elsewhere. Russia's initial military infiltration and easy coordination with its proxy forces was also only possible due to the shared language and ethnicity of the occupation force with the "separatists."

The annexation of Crimea was possible because Moscow had already spent years undermining Kiev's ability to defend its sovereignty. When the Euromaidan removed Russia's proxy from power, Putin was faced with a very narrow window to carry out an operation that would meet his domestic political needs, his strategic goals for domination in the near abroad, and to shock the sources he perceived to be Russia's greatest threat, the neo-liberal West. To reduce the chances of Western interference, Putin hid an invasion behind other world events and maintained the guise of local unrest while minimizing violence to play down the significance of what was happening. With a corresponding assault of disinformation, Putin was able to create doubt about the nature of the invasion until he was signing the annexation of Crimea into the Russian Constitution.

Crimea also possesses some unique attributes that helped Russia overcome potential Ukrainian resistance. Crimea was already home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The existing Russian military bases and thousands of resident Russian sailors and marines served as a Trojan horse for the invading force. Crimea is a peninsula that is connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land. Once the seizure of Ukrainian installations had begun, it was not difficult to block all movement between the two

entities. This chokepoint helped Russia limit the sources of information covering the takeover. It also ensured that any military response from Kiev, who had just lost most of its maritime capability, would be bottlenecked on a narrow land bridge and extremely vulnerable to aerial interdiction and artillery fire. The lack of similar favorable circumstances and the attempt to immediately replicate the success of Crimea when the world's attention was now directly on Russia's action in Ukraine led to a much different outcome in Donbas.

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VI. RUSSIA IN DONBAS, UKRAINE, 2014–2015

Following the annexation of Crimea, it has become the habit of observers to look narrowly at Russia's actions on the peninsula from late February through late March of 2014 to formulate theories about Russia's "new way of war" and speculate as to where this mixture of non-attributable forces and local separatists might be used in the future. That narrow frame of reference fixates on the military forms of war as they were used to consolidate control over a strategic objective, but frequently misses the larger campaign of political warfare that Russia had carried out to subvert Ukraine's sovereignty for years. Even as the Russians were finishing the capture of the last Ukrainian garrisons on Crimea, they seemed to answer the question about their next objective when small groups of pro-Russian "separatists" began demonstrating near and threatening to seize government buildings in cities across Ukraine's south and east, beginning a series of actions that would result in bitter conventional warfare and cost thousands of lives. Given the same aggressor and victim it is valuable to examine the differences in conditions that resulted in completely opposite outcomes between the mostly bloodless annexation of Crimea and the very bloody war in eastern Ukraine.

Heady from their "bloodless" success in annexing Crimea, the Russians rushed to duplicate this process in eastern Ukraine and, thus far, have failed. The Russian effort in the Donetsk Basin (Donbas) is an example of an attempt to force a dynamic change in the status quo when the necessary conditions for successful hybrid warfare were no longer present. While the central Ukrainian government was too disorganized to orchestrate an effective resistance against the occupation of Crimea, by the time the first Russian proxies began seizing government buildings and declaring independence in Eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian government and the international community were paying close attention. The annexation of Crimea had a psychological effect on the Putin regime; its masterful execution and the lack of consequences silenced any remaining skeptics and engendered a sense of invincibility.⁴²⁸ The annexation was also wildly popular in Russia

⁴²⁸ Ben Judah, "Putin's Coup: How the Russian Leader used the Ukraine Crisis to Consolidate His Dictatorship," *Politico*, October 19, 2014.

and Putin's domestic approval ratings soared from 54 percent in 2013 to 83 percent in 2014.⁴²⁹ This renewed domestic support satisfied Putin's primary objective of stabilizing his political control in Russia; not only did the annexation satisfy a popular sentiment among his nationalist base, but the employment of the military to meet an external threat, real or imagined, enabled Putin to reframe his domestic opponents from being merely voices of internal dissent into agents of the foreign enemy. He must have also realized that the popularity of the moment was fleeting; eventually the costs from the sanctions that the annexation incurred would have a negative effect on the average Russian, and he would risk a domestic political backlash. Putin's circle of advisors had shrunk to a handful of the *siloviki*, and with the popularity of the success in Crimea, any remaining voices of caution had been largely silenced.⁴³⁰ On the heels of Crimea, Putin and his advisors made one of two calculations. Either they misjudged the level of actual popular support among Ukraine's ethnic Russians for joining with the Federation, or they wanted a more violent confrontation that they could control as a bargaining chip to secure Western acceptance of Crimea's new Russian ownership.⁴³¹ Either way, the ensuing "separatist movement" was purely a product of the Kremlin's deliberate creation, even if its objectives were uncertain. "Russian propaganda frames the Ukraine crisis as a civil war. In reality, the conflict in Ukraine's east is a Kremlin manufactured war—fueled by Russian-made military equipment, fought by Russian soldiers, and supported by Mr. Putin."⁴³² Putin may have also become a victim of his own propaganda toward Ukraine. By insisting the Crimean annexation was a defensive operation to protect ethnic Russians from a neo-Nazi junta in Kiev, he changed the issue from a territorial dispute into an ideological conflict, forcing Moscow to become further involved to "defend" ethnic

⁴²⁹ Julie Ray and Neli Esipova, "Russian Approval of Putin Soars to Highest Level in Years," *Gallup.com*, July 18, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/173597/russian-approval-putin-soars-highest-level-years.aspx>.

⁴³⁰ Judah, *Putin's Coup: How the Russian Leader used the Ukraine Crisis to Consolidate His Dictatorship*

⁴³¹ Nemtsov, *Putin. War*, 6–7. The Nemtsov report makes these two general assessments to explain Putin's pursuit of action operations in Donbas.

⁴³² Maksymilian Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2015), 1.

Russians from the same supposed threat, or risk undermining the support of the domestic Russian nationalists.

The lack of Ukrainian military resistance to the Russian invasion of Crimea forced the interim government in Kiev to evaluate the true status of the Ukrainian military and to deal with some hard truths. For years the various governments had paid lip service to modernizing the military, but the regular national fiscal shortcomings and vastly overestimated revenues from the sales of old military equipment and facilities resulted in an Army that could barely pay salaries and facility operational costs, let alone upgrade equipment and training.⁴³³ As the occupation was unfolding, and with uncertain Russian intentions on Ukraine's eastern border, the Ukrainian armed forces were placed on their highest state of alert and their actual numbers were made known to the interim government; of 41,000 soldiers in the active Army, only 6,000 were combat ready.⁴³⁴ When Putin decided to annex Crimea, the Ukrainian was projecting military weakness. When Ukraine struggled to mobilize its reserves to counter the first FSB organized separatists in eastern Ukraine, his assessment had not been altered.

Given the Russian military's demonstrated competence in pulling off the Crimea occupation, and Ukraine's lack of ability to deter aggression, Putin may have been tempted to exploit the situation and seize eastern Ukraine outright.⁴³⁵ Such a move however, would have inevitably met resistance and turned bloody. Without a veil of deniability or a clear objective (taking eastern Ukraine up to the Dnepr River would put Russian forces in areas that are not ethnic Russian majorities which would hurt the narrative of defending Russians in the near-abroad), Putin also had to worry about the reaction from the West. So far, the smoke screen of propaganda and manufactured excuses for international inaction had prevented physical reprisals. With no impending

⁴³³ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 61–72.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 69–70.

⁴³⁵ Phillip A. Karber, "*Lessons Learned*" from the Russo-Ukrainian War (Washington, DC: The Potomac Foundation, 2015). Karber references a number of Russian battle plans drawn up for the Russian western Military District to seize all Ukrainian territory east of the Dnepr that have been discovered and published by Ukrainian sources. The authenticity of these documents cannot be verified, but they were unsigned and have a high probability of being authentic contingency plans that were unused for any number of reasons. Karber believes that the rapid mobilization of Ukraine's military and the effectiveness of the ATO led the Kremlin to have to reconsider how long and costly an outright invasion would be.

Western military response likely, Putin did not want to provide an excuse for an intervention in eastern Ukraine that might dislodge him from Crimea as well. While the Russians weighed a full invasion, the Ukrainians “conducted the largest counter-mobilization of any European army since World War Two and deployed fifteen Brigades east of the Dnepr ... Putin blinked, and ,for whatever reason, instead opted for a less overt hybrid-surrogate campaign in Donbass.”⁴³⁶ In keeping with Gerasimov’s advice to not underestimate the “protest potential” of the people, Putin recognized the value in framing his offensive action as a popular civilian uprising as he had in Crimea. Putin was also aware of the Western preference for action to stop violence perpetrated by a state, while regularly “permitting or ‘excusing’ sub-state violence carried out by activists, community organizations or ‘the people.’”⁴³⁷ Putin decided to continue his dismantling of Ukraine, but in a manner that played to this Western preference, despite the now acknowledged Russian military presence in Crimea. Unfortunately for Putin and his advisors, they had grossly miscalculated the level of popular support for an uprising in eastern Ukraine. Not only would “leadership, money and weapons not be enough to spark a local rebellion against Kiev in the Donbas,” but Moscow would also have to fill the rebel ranks with “volunteers” from Russia proper.⁴³⁸

During the crisis in eastern Ukraine, a number of Western analysts attempted to catalogue and create models for Russia’s action. One of the more detailed studies drew from the Gerasimov model as a framework for direct observations of the conflict in Donbas, and listed five core elements of Russia’s “New Generation Warfare”:

- 1) POLITICAL SUBVERSION: Insertion of agents; classic “agi-prop” information operations employing modern mass media to exploit ethnic-linguistic-class differences; corruption, compromise and intimidation of

⁴³⁶ Karber, “*Lessons Learned*” from the Russo-Ukrainian War. Karber uses the term “hybrid” as many western observers/ analysts do; to generally imply a mix of proxy/ surrogates and conventional forces.

⁴³⁷ John R. Haines, “Putin’s ‘New Warfare,’” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (May, 2014). Haines lists four tactics of Putin’s “New War”: 1) Use noncombatants as human shields, 2) dominate the media, 3) accuse others of what you are doing yourself, 4) influence the “liberated” to become proxies for continued ethnic cleansing against opposing population. Haines concludes that this type of warfare is effective at bypassing an opponent’s traditional military ability to resist, and minimizes the potential for external intervention by using a narrative of civil unrest to mask military action.

⁴³⁸ Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine*, 4–5.

local officials; backed up with kidnapping, assassination and terrorism; recruiting discontented elements into a cellular cadre enforced with murderous discipline.

2) PROXY SANCTUARY: Seizing local governmental centers, police stations, airports and military depots; arming and training insurgents; creating checkpoints and destroying ingress transportation infrastructure; cyberattacks compromising victim communications; phony referendum with single party representation; establishment of a “People’s Republic” under Russian tutelage.

3) INTERVENTION: Deploying of the Russian forces to the border with sudden large-scale exercises involving ground, naval, air and airborne troops; surreptitious introduction of heavy weapons to insurgents; creation of training and logistics camps adjacent to the border; commitment of so-called “volunteer” combined-arms Battalion Tactical Groups; integrating proxy troops into Russian equipped, supported and led higher-level formations.

4) COERCIVE DETERRENCE: Secret strategic force alerts and snap checks—forward deployment of tactical nuclear delivery systems; theater and intercontinental “in your face” maneuvers; aggressive air patrolling of neighboring areas to inhibit their involvement.

5) NEGOTIATED MANIPULATION: The use and abuse of Western negotiated ceasefires to rearm their proxies; using violations to bleed the opponent’s Army while inhibiting other states from helping under the fear of escalation—divide the Western alliance by playing economic incentives, selective and repetitive phone negotiations infatuating a favorite security partner.⁴³⁹

This study has subsequently been used to graph a linear correlation between an increase in intensity and an increase in state responsibility (or attribution to the aggressor state).⁴⁴⁰ These elements of “New Generation Warfare” are a helpful depiction of Russian tactics employed in east Ukraine, and they were also used in different proportions in Crimea. They cannot however, be assumed to represent a phased

⁴³⁹ Phillip A. Karber, “Russia’s “New Generation Warfare,”” *NGA Pathfinder* 14, no. 2 (Spring, 2015), 11–13. Karber frames his observations in Ukraine with Gerasimov’s model, but it is important to remember that Gerasimov himself intended the model to describe the methodologies through which he believed the West was fomenting regime change during the Arab Spring and in the Color Revolutions. Gerasimov framed the process in a manner that made sense to Russians which is enlightening, and he wanted to prompt Russia into ensuring they were looking at ways to match these actions.

⁴⁴⁰ Johnson, *Update: Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine ‘is Working’*

methodology for how Russia will pursue hybrid warfare in the future, nor can they be divorced from the larger strategy to force a target state (and the international order) to accept Russia's will. Russia's efforts to foment separatism in Donbas may have begun in earnest in March 2014, but they were only conceptually possible because of the concerted, years-long, effort to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty through political proxies, economic warfare, and information operations.

A. HYBRID WARFARE REQUISITE CONDITIONS

1. Russian Strategic Goals

Putin's strategic goals before the annexation of Crimea were to strengthen his domestic popular support, prevent a unified Ukraine from joining the EU and NATO, and challenge the spread of western neo-liberalism into Russia. Additionally, he wanted to maintain his ability to project power throughout the Black Sea, and challenge Ukraine's ability to move away from Russian energy dependence. Where the annexation of Crimea clearly moved the Russian position toward those ends, the strategic objectives associated with Russian actions in Donbass are far less certain. In the spring of 2014, Russia may have found that it had assumed a course of action almost reflexively in eastern Ukraine based on the success of the Crimea operation, before reformulating a strategy that accounted for how the annexation of Crimea may have altered the geopolitical environment. As FSB officers began organizing "self-defense forces" and seizing police stations, city halls and other symbols of Ukrainian power, Moscow was forced to consider the fiscal impact of the new Crimean related sanctions, as well as the cost of supporting the population of the highly dependent peninsula, and the levels of troops needed to perform occupation duties to ensure the population did not begin to challenge Russian rule. Moscow also had to examine the value of Donbas and what means of future influence the Kremlin would have over Kiev. Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine had so far resulted in a significant victory, but in continuing to strike while the iron was hot Russia risked being drawn deeper into a conflict with less clear objectives and greater potential for external intervention.

Just as the large untapped gas fields surrounding Crimea affected Putin's cost-benefit calculation for following through with annexation of the peninsula, the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions have energy reserves which would facilitate Kiev's desire to achieve energy independence. Eastern Ukraine has several large shale oil reserves and an established coal industry which are central to Ukraine's plan to shift away from Russian dependence to domestic sources of energy.⁴⁴¹ Given the loss of potential resources due to the loss of Crimea however, it is unlikely that the energy potential of eastern Ukraine are sufficient to wean Ukraine off of Russian energy, nor are they significant enough for Russia to go to war to obtain. Russia is in the process of rebuilding its military capability and eastern Ukraine has some industrial facilities that could be useful in this effort, but the fighting would quickly damage much of the infrastructure and displace a large portion of the potential work force. Any hypothetical future benefit would have to be attained at a real cost of existing Russian military inventory.

Outright annexation of the Donbas would also work against Moscow's future ability to influence the political situation in Kiev. The seizure of Crimea had already removed one significant pro-Russian voting block from Ukrainian national politics. The annexation of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts would virtually ensure that no pro-Russian position would ever gain any significant support in the Ukrainian government. It would therefore be in Russia's interest for eastern Ukraine to remain under Kiev, but in a federated status with as much autonomy as possible. The idea of a "special" status and federation with the freedom to pursue independent trade relations with Russia would later become a regular talking point for the rebels during ceasefire negotiations.⁴⁴²

Support for military operations in Donbas would also require the commitment of Russian soldiers, over 20,000 of whom were now needed to secure Russia's hold over Crimea. The only thing more damaging to Russia than the Western sanctions would be a Tatar or Ukrainian insurgency taking shape on the newly acquired peninsula. Not only would such a movement be costly to suppress, but it would crack the carefully

⁴⁴¹ Umbach, *The Energy Dimensions of Russia's Annexation of Crimea*

⁴⁴² "Ukraine Rebels Seek 'Special Status', Crisis Talks to Resume on Friday." *Reuters*, September 01, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/01/us-ukraine-crisis-separatists-idUSKBN0GW2ER20140901>.

constructed façade of unanimous popular support for joining Russia and undermine the propaganda campaign of Russian protectionism. With so many troops needed to enforce Russian governance on Crimea, the personnel and equipment available to support military action in the Donbas would be limited despite the large numbers assembled on Ukraine's eastern border.

These realizations may have been slow to set in. Following early “separatist” successes in storming police garrisons and seizing weapons, and the Kiev government facilitating Moscow's information campaign by passing some ill-conceived anti-Russian language laws, Moscow's propaganda machine began to turn the conflict from a question of self-determination, into a clash of incompatible ideologies with a moral imperative for Russians to obliterate an emerging “fascist” threat in its infancy. With Putin's grip on power rising on the tide of this same nationalist sentiment, there was no effort on Moscow's part to tone down the rhetoric. Initially, the strategic objectives of the Donbas campaign may not have mattered as the gains were coming at little cost to Moscow. Well over a year later, with thousands of dead on both sides, Russia was still stuck in a cycle of conducting tactical maneuvers to preserve Putin's power, with little discernable strategic end for the conflict with Ukraine let alone a policy for Russia's relationship with the rest of the world.⁴⁴³ Despite the lack of strategic value in Donbas, Russia perpetuated the conflict there as a sequel to the Crimean operation, as part of a greater strategy of hybrid warfare against Ukraine.

2. Masking the Dynamic Change to the Status Quo

Russia's offensive-realist world perspective and years-long strategy of destabilizing Ukraine had apparently paid off with the annexation of the strategically important Crimean peninsula in March of 2014. Given the relative ease of that operation and its popularity with the Russian population, similar efforts by the Russian intelligence services to initiate separatist movements in other Russian enclaves seemed to gain a burst

⁴⁴³ Andrei Kolesnikov, “The Russian Regime in 2015: All Tactics, no Strategy,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, September 09, 2015.

of momentum in April of 2014.⁴⁴⁴ Russian FSB and GRU officers organized “separatist” groups and began to challenge Ukrainian governance. Small pro-Russian rallies were inflated to give the appearance of wide-spread popularity. The separatist militias rapidly grew more effective as they received new volunteers from the Russian federation, and for a short period of time they held some degree of momentum in claiming Ukrainian territory under the banner of Novorossiya. In the wake of Crimea however, the world’s attention was not on Olympic Games or even protests in Kiev. There were some alarming developments in Iraq and Syria, but the attention of Europe and Kiev was directly on Russian activity in Ukraine. The Ukrainian government was painfully aware of the de facto loss of Crimea and had no more pressing concern than preventing the succession of even more territory. Russia’s well publicized use of unmarked soldiers pretending to be local militia in Crimea only increased the suspicion of the true origin of the masked “local separatists” who began appearing in a number of southern and eastern Ukrainian cities. Several small pro-Russian movements were also crushed in their infancy.⁴⁴⁵ Russia failed to adequately disguise the opening moves of its proxy campaign in southern and eastern Ukraine and even drew more attention to small elements that may have actually included local separatists.

While there was little effort to hide the intended change in the political dynamic, it is possible that the actions in southern and eastern Ukraine were themselves used to mask Russia’s consolidation of power in Crimea. With rapidly escalating levels of violence and reports of atrocities, media attention and independent reporting tended to center on the line of overt conflict in eastern Ukraine. It was not on the implementation of laws and the population control measures including disappearances of opposition members in Crimea. Given Russia’s vehement denial of involvement in Crimea well past

⁴⁴⁴ Russian domestic support for the annexation was not universal. In September 2014 thousands of Russians demonstrated in Moscow against the ongoing “undeclared” war in Ukraine.

⁴⁴⁵ Sergei L. Loiko and Carol J. Williams, “Police Say 42 Killed in Odessa in Worst Violence of Ukraine Crisis,” *LA Times*, May 02, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-wn-ukraine-russia-odessa-clash-20140502-story.html>. In the Odessa case, several hundred pro-Russian agitators got into a physical altercation with several thousand pro-Ukraine marchers. In the ensuing melee, the more hardline Russians were forced to retreat into a trade union building. There are different accounts of the point of origin, but the building was set on fire and the separatists died. While this loss of life was labeled a “tragedy” at the time, no significant separatist movement took place in Odessa after that, even as the situation in the eastern oblasts deteriorated into open war.

the point of plausibility, it is not surprising that Russia continued to deny any involvement in the eastern Ukrainian conflict despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Even with the world's attention on Ukraine following the Crimea annexation and the materialization of a "separatist movement" composed mostly of non-natives, Russia continued to use the same tools it had employed in Crimea to create uncertainty and provide appeasers with excuses for inaction.

B. ABOVE-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: DIPLOMATIC WARFARE

One aspect of information operations that blossomed with the advent of the war in eastern Ukraine was Russia's domination and manipulation of the social sentiment sections of news source and shared media forums. These "troll" armies, operating on very specific guidance from their Russian government handlers, made efforts to appear to be a variety of private citizens with distinct online personas in order to create the appearance of popular sentiment.⁴⁴⁶ They then saturated the blog sections of any story involving Russia, the Ukraine, or other Western political policy with pro-Putin, anti U.S. messages, often providing links to sources of disinformation, conspiracy theories, and real but derogatory news. Troll farms served to sow doubt and disinformation among other readers, manipulate any attempts at analyzing public sentiment, and to compliment other narrative-shaping efforts through Russia's more well-known mechanisms like *RT*. More insidiously, Russia used an instrument of a free society, the unrestricted sharing of ideas through new media, as a weapon to undermine the value of open discourse. Taken together with Russia's efforts to promote the Kremlin's version of "facts" through official statements, press-releases, documentaries, select video clips, and carefully orchestrated "interviews" with President Putin, the efforts of the blog trolls are only one part of a massive effort to fabricate and sustain an alternative reality for anyone inclined to believe the West is the source of all of the world's woes.

The troll farms represent only one line of effort in the Kremlin's massive information warfare campaign. Since early 2014, Moscow's operatives have registered

⁴⁴⁶ "In Russia, Fake Bloggers Hired to Spout Pro-Kremlin Propaganda," *Japan Times*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/13/world/politics-diplomacy-world/russia-fake-bloggers-hired-spout-pro-kremlin-propaganda/#.VmD1A3bTmUk>.

dozens of domain names for a network of pro-Kremlin websites with names like: “Donetsk-news.com, newsmariupol.com, news-odessa.com” as well as other sites for promoting different propaganda efforts like “materiel-evidence.com.”⁴⁴⁷ The nodes of this network have been linked through digital forensics to central points of origin and control to the so-called “Internet Research Agency” in St. Petersburg.⁴⁴⁸ The “Material Evidence” domain has also been linked to propaganda promotion in the physical world. “Businessmen” from Material Evidence procured the services of western journalists and paid for a touring photographic exhibition in the U.S. and Europe that highlighted the violence and right-wing aspects of the Euromaidan.⁴⁴⁹

Moscow never intended to be content with Crimea. Even as Russia was consolidating its control over Crimea, Putin made another attempt to use czarist era diplomacy to end the Ukraine as an entity. The slightly eccentric Russian deputy speaker of the Duma, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, sent letters to the governments of Poland, Romania and Hungary, proposing a joint division of the remainder of Ukraine along the lines of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939.⁴⁵⁰ As soon as Putin decided to take a full-scale invasion of Ukraine off the table, he immediately reached out to the OSCE to craft a “road map” to peace that would require Kiev to cease offensive operations against the rebels and agree to constitutional reforms that would protect the rights of Ukraine’s ethnic Russians.⁴⁵¹ This diplomatic outreach played on the Western preference for negotiated agreements to the point of blindness in believing that Russia was acting in

⁴⁴⁷ Lawrence Alexander, “When Online Kremlin Propaganda Leaves the Web, it Looks Like This,” Stopfake.org, September 29, 2015, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/when-online-kremlin-propaganda-leaves-the-web-it-looks-like-this/>.

⁴⁴⁸ Lawrence Alexander, “Open-Source Information Reveals Pro-Kremlin Web Campaign,” Globalvoices.org, July 13, 2015, <https://globalvoices.org/2015/07/13/open-source-information-reveals-pro-kremlin-web-campaign/>.

⁴⁴⁹ Alexander, *When Online Kremlin Propaganda Leaves the Web, it Looks Like This*

⁴⁵⁰ Lidia Kelly, “Russian Politician Proposes New Divisions of Ukraine,” *Reuters*, March 24, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/24/ukraine-crisis-partition-letter-idUSL5N0ML1LO20140324>. Zhirinovsky’s party confirmed that he sent the letters and that the suggestion to break up Ukraine through referendums in the border states is the best way to dissemble an artificial state that is comprised of entities that will never be able to coexist. See also: Jennifer Monaghan, “LDPR Advises Poland, Romania and Hungary to Divide Ukraine,” *Moscow Times*, March 25, 2014.

⁴⁵¹ Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga and Marek Menkiszak, *Russia to Ukraine: Subversion and Diplomacy*, (Center for Eastern Studies (OSW), 2014).

good faith. Russia proposing a diplomatic resolution to an armed conflict that was entirely a product of Russian invention is illustrative of the hybrid employment of limited force and diplomatic warfare against Ukraine. Once the Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation (ATO) against the rebels started, Moscow continued to push for an immediate cessation of offensive action by Kiev as part of its diplomatic narrative. The sudden change to diplomacy is reflective of the interchangeability of any of the forms of war provided they achieve the desired effect. To get the tanks and artillery needed for the rebels to block the Ukrainian advances, the Russians would have to transport those items across the border along a network of questionably controlled roads to a patchwork of rebel positions. Instead, Russia attempted to achieve the physical military effect of stopping the Ukrainian advances against the rebels with non-military means.⁴⁵²

When questioned about Russian sponsorship of “separatists in Eastern Ukraine in April 2014, Putin flatly denied Russian involvement: “Nonsense. There are no Russian units in eastern Ukraine—no special services, no tactical advisors. All this is being done by the local residents, and the proof of that is the fact that those people have literally removed their masks. So I told my Western partners, [these people] have nowhere to go, and they won’t leave. This is their land and you need to negotiate with them.”⁴⁵³ This statement followed Putin’s assertion that diplomacy was the appropriate vehicle for resolving the eastern Ukrainian crisis, a refrain that was meant to play to the preferences of Western powers for crisis resolution, and not based on any genuine effort to want to end a process that he had intentionally instigated. “Order in the country can only be restored through dialogue and democratic procedures, rather than with the use of armed force, tanks and aircraft.”⁴⁵⁴

Putin’s regular injection of the so-called “Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics” (DPR/ LPR) into the negotiation process also provided de facto legitimacy to Moscow’s proxy as a separate political entity, and his subsequent “appeal” for the separatists to delay their referendum on sovereignty, provided the possibility of a

⁴⁵² Wierzbowska-Miazga and Menkiszak, *Russia to Ukraine: Subversion and Diplomacy*, May 08.

⁴⁵³ Kremlin.ru, *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

mediated solution as cover for his recalculation of the region's value as a pro-Russian voting bloc in whatever government emerged in Kiev.⁴⁵⁵ Russia's diplomatic efforts were closely supported by their broader information operation efforts to portray the post-Euromaidan government as a "junta" and the FSB led rebellion in the east as a popular movement of resistance.

Incredibly, some Russian hybrid warfare participants took it as a forgone conclusion that Russia was actually losing the information war.⁴⁵⁶ None other than FSB Colonel Igor "Strelkov" Girkin, now the military leader of the pro-Russian "separatists" near Sloviansk, expressed his belief that the lack of popular local support for the Donbas separatists was only due to a lack of an effective information campaign to mobilize popular sentiment. Strelkov claimed the Russians in Ukraine couldn't see war coming because they had known peace for too long and could not see why it was needed.⁴⁵⁷ So Strelkov, the Russian FSB Colonel who helped fabricate the farcical Crimea referendum in March 2014, had been in Donbas for a month and could not understand why the people were not mobilized to resist Ukraine. He could see that the new "junta" in Kiev was obviously planning to oppress the ethnic Russians, but those same Russians somehow did not share this opinion. Only after he was forced to flee Sloviansk by advancing Ukrainian forces and he could blame the shelling of Russian areas on the Ukrainian Army, could he point at the Russian civilians and explain that this was the oppression he had warned them about.

⁴⁵⁵ Wierzbowska-Miazga and Menkiszak, *Russia to Ukraine: Subversion and Diplomacy*, May 08

⁴⁵⁶ "Igor Strelkov / Marat Musin Interview 29.10.2014," YouTube video, 7:15 from an interview on Neuromir TV, October 29, 2014, posted by "larasdvatri123," November 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ3VAn2Tfhc>. Musin attributes the Ukrainian resistance to Russian domination to "brainwashing" by Western influences. Strelkov concurs and attributes the "zombification" of otherwise educated and decent Ukrainian people to "neuro-linguistic programming," the effects of which he himself felt when he would watch Ukrainian TV while fighting in Donbas and subsequently begin to question why he was fighting against Kiev in the first place. In the same interview, Strelkov claims that counter-propaganda is pointless, but the physical destruction of television broadcast stations is an effective antidote to the demoralizing effects of this "technology." While it might seem a little incredulous from a Western perspective, the theme of "zombification" and the nonchalant referral to "neuro-linguistic programing" are recurring ideas in a number of these types of interviews and either represent an actual belief on the part of people like Strelkov that every television broadcast not of Moscow origin is part of a Western plot at mind control, or Strelkov is consciously propagating this perception for a Russian public that does believe it.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16:15.

C. NON-MILITARY FORMS OF WAR: ECONOMIC, LEGAL, AND PROPAGANDA WARFARE

On 1 April, 2014, Moscow raised the price of Russian gas to Ukraine for the second time in two days.⁴⁵⁸ A week later, Moscow threatened to cut off Ukraine's gas supply citing \$16 billion in unpaid bills. Prime Minister Medvedev suggested that Russia might require pre-payment for gas in the future and Putin agreed in principle but then interceded and asked that Gazprom "delay such a move given the difficult situation in Ukraine."⁴⁵⁹ Through this bit of theater, not only was Russia demonstrating that the heavy amount of economic leverage that it held over Kiev had not changed following the annexation of Crimea, but Putin directly linked the intensity of Russian demands with the Kiev's response to the crisis that Moscow was deliberately perpetuating.

On 7 April 2014, a former Soviet submariner and a handful of Russian speaking separatists armed with clubs seized an 11-story Ukrainian government building in Donetsk and declared the existence of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR).⁴⁶⁰ This was the origin of the "separatist" myth and was representative of the very low percentage of the Russian speaking population that wanted to break away from Ukraine or join formally with Russia. It may have also presented Putin with a dilemma. Russia was still consolidating its forces in Crimea and was not positioned for an armed intervention in Ukraine, but Moscow could also not allow a potentially useful popular movement to be crushed in its infancy. As the Kremlin considered options, agents like Strelkov were dispatched to organize the rebels and make sure they were responsive to Moscow's direction. Within weeks, the DPR leadership position of "President" would be filled by a political consultant from Moscow, Aleksander Borodai, and the Minister of Defense

⁴⁵⁸ "Special Police Shot Kiev Protesters, Inquiry Says." *BBC News*, April 03, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26868119>.

⁴⁵⁹ David M. Herszenhorn, "Putin Warns of Restricting Natural Gas Supply to Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 09, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/10/world/europe/putin-warns-of-restricting-natural-gas-supply-to-ukraine.html?action=click&contentCollection=Europe&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pg_type=article&_r=0.

⁴⁶⁰ Andrew Higgins, "In Eastern Ukraine, a One-Building, Pro-Russia Realm Persists Despite Criticism," *New York Times*, April 09, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/10/world/europe/ukraine-russia.html?_r=0

would be assumed by Strelkov.⁴⁶¹ As the Ukrainian ATO continued to reverse the rebels' early gains through July 2014, Moscow took an even greater role in the upper management of the DPR. The few remaining Ukrainian-born separatists were eased out of key leadership positions and replaced with political advisors and military commanders from Moscow who had experience in Transdnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and more recently in Crimea.⁴⁶²

Russian propagandists made every effort to stoke the sentiment of local rage against the Ukrainian forces. One of the more egregious claims aired on Russia's Channel 1 TV was a story about Ukrainian soldiers crucifying a 3-year old boy after capturing an ethnic Russian village.⁴⁶³ The story was a complete fabrication and the woman who made the claims was identified making other unsubstantiated claims in different places along the front. Nevertheless, the story was repeated over and over in the Russian media until it became widely accepted as a fact among Russian viewers. Even this fabricated story would seem mild when compared to the propagandists' efforts to spin the shooting down of MH17.

D. MILITARY FORMS OF WAR

NATO estimated that Russia had 40,000 troops on the Ukrainian border in early April 2014 when pro-Russian "separatists" began seizing government buildings in Ukraine's southern and eastern oblasts.⁴⁶⁴ With the Crimean takeover still ongoing, Kiev was quick to identify the presence of insignia-less "little green men" as likely Russian Spetsnaz following the same pattern that Russia had used at the outset of Russia's surprise occupation of the peninsula. Not only were the methods the same, but some of the individual Russian operatives were the same as well, including GRU Colonel Igor

⁴⁶¹ Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine*, 3.

⁴⁶² Gabriela Baczyńska and Aleksandar Vasovic, "Pushing Locals Aside, Russians Take Top Rebel Posts in East Ukraine," *Reuters*, July 27, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/27/us-ukraine-crisis-reb-els-insight-idUSKBN0FW07020140727>.

⁴⁶³ "Russian TV Sparks Outrage with Ukraine Child 'Crucifixion' Claim," AFP, July 14, 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/russian-tv-sparks-outrage-ukraine-child-crucifixion-claim-114839196.html>.

⁴⁶⁴ Adrian Croft, "Russia could Achieve Ukraine Incursion in 3–5 Days," *Reuters*, April 02, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/03/us-ukraine-crisis-breedlove-idUSBREA310PP20140403>.

“Strelkov” Girkin.⁴⁶⁵ Seeing what was happening and being able to do something about it, however, were two different things. While the undertrained, underequipped, poorly led Ukrainian Army struggled to shake off years of neglect, the “rebels” were consolidating their control over a number of population centers in the Donbas and were beginning to expand to the west. This expansion was halted when the rebels ran into an unexpected irregular force of Ukrainians, organized, equipped and funded by a powerful Ukrainian oligarch and acting governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, Igor Kolomoisky.⁴⁶⁶ Through a combination of concessions for moderates and bounties for the capture of hardline separatists, Kolomoisky was able to quell any separatist sentiment in Dnipropetrovsk while his “Dnipro Battalion” locked down pro-Russian agitators’ access to the city and began conducting counter separatist raids in rebel held areas.⁴⁶⁷ Another, more controversial, Ukrainian defense battalion also began conducting offensive action against the Russian militia. *Pravii Sektor* (Right Sector) is one of these units. Right Sector has political ties, as its name implies, to Ukrainian right-wing nationalists. Its relatively small presence during Euromaidan was a point of focus for RT and other Russian propagandists who wanted to portray the entire movement as a neo-Nazi coup. Some members of the militia have also not done themselves any favors by incorporating Nazi SS or swastikas into their motley battle dress, adding visual “verification” of Russian claims of fascist orientation. Political motivations aside, Right Sector, the Dnipro Battalion, and other irregular Ukrainian forces were able to mobilize as a significant enough defense force to halt the expansion of the pro-Russian movement while the Ukrainian Army was in a state of confusion. These militia bought the Ukrainian government time. The Ukrainian Army

⁴⁶⁵ Bill Gertz, “Ukrainian Rebel Commander Identified as Russian GRU Military Intelligence Colonel,” *Washington Free Beacon*, June 20, 2014, <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/ukrainian-rebel-commander-identified-as-russian-gru-military-intelligence-colonel/>.

⁴⁶⁶ Vijai Maheshwari, “The Town Determined to Stop Putin,” *Daily Beast*, June 12, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/12/dnipropetrovsk-the-ukrainian-town-determined-to-stop-putin.html>.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Kolomoisky’s battalions were likely the one unforeseen obstacle to the pro-Russian forces consolidating a much larger hold over Eastern Ukraine. They have not escaped the Kremlin’s notice either. The militia have been the objects of some of Moscow’s most vitriolic claims of Ukrainian Nazi affiliation and crimes against ethnic Russians, a claim that is somewhat ironic considering that Kolomoisky himself is Jewish. A year later, and the Ukrainian government moved to fold Kolomoisky’s forces into the regular UA, and to break his control over Ukrainian oil companies. See also: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-government-tries-to-rein-in-oligarch-ally-1427144794>

conducted a massive mobilization of national manpower and, in late May 2014, launched a highly effective Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) that rapidly pushed the rebels back toward the Russian border. By mid-July 2014, the Ukrainian's ATO had severely degraded the Russian militia and the movement was in danger of being completely crushed. This momentum was halted and dramatically reversed by the introduction of Russian artillery and rocket fire from the Russian side of the border followed by a dramatic increase in Russian regular Army soldiers and heavy equipment in Ukraine.

Unlike the 2008 invasion of Georgia, where declared Russian forces crossed overtly into Georgian territory, Moscow was determined to continue to mask Russia's direct role in the fighting in eastern Ukraine. This continued subterfuge was maintained largely to minimize the potential political impact resulting from Russian soldiers being killed while fighting an undeclared war against a neighbor who had not attacked Russia. The extent to which the Russians went to promote this implausible deniability was incredible, but their deception plan was only thinly based on repetitive denial and not any sophisticated ruse. The evidence of active involvement of Russian soldiers and equipment in the fighting quickly became "overwhelming and indisputable."⁴⁶⁸ When some of the actual local separatists began looting and following their own directions, Moscow sent in the Vostok Battalion to clear them out of government buildings and assert Russian control.⁴⁶⁹ The Russian Vostok Battalion was made up of Chechen special operations troops, led by Russian officers, and had a history of operations in the Caucasus including participation in the invasion of Georgia in 2008.⁴⁷⁰ Outside of Chechen militia, Cossacks, and other Russian "patriotic volunteers" the widespread presence of regular Russian soldiers was dismissed by Moscow as "volunteers" who had taken their personal

⁴⁶⁸ Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine*, 3. Russian soldiers use social media as much as their Western counterparts, and numerous photographs, descriptions, videos, and statements regarding fighting in Ukraine have been discovered. A cottage industry of civilian analysts has also discovered mountains of proof regarding Russian military equipment being transported throughout the Federation and then being located on Ukrainian soil. Others have spent considerable effort debunking Russian propaganda by linking Russian photographs of destroyed equipment or displaced people to photographs from other conflicts.

⁴⁶⁹ Claire Bigg, "Vostok Battalion, a Powerful New Player in Eastern Ukraine," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, May 30, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/vostok-battalion-a-powerful-new-player-in-eastern-ukraine/25404785.html>.

⁴⁷⁰ Gertz, *Ukrainian Rebel Commander Identified as Russian GRU Military Intelligence Colonel*

leave to go fight for a noble cause. As more and more Russian soldiers were ordered to go to Ukraine, often after signing a phony separation from the Army, they were placed in composite units to prevent a large number of casualties from affecting any one parent organization. The mix of units helped to mask the complete numbers of active forces that had actually been committed to the Ukrainian fight, but it also degraded their operational effectiveness, resulting in higher casualties.

One of the foremost of the Russian operatives posing as a separatist leader was GRU Colonel Igor “Strelkov” Girkin.⁴⁷¹ Strelkov described his “separatist” forces in eastern Ukraine as being at a 3:1, 7:1, and even 10:1 disadvantage against Ukrainian forces as the Ukrainian ATO began to gain momentum.⁴⁷² He also claimed there were 300 men in his force near Slavyansk in April 2014. This claim indicates two things: 1) the “popular” uprising was not so popular and 2) “non-linear warfare” was not conducted by choice but out of necessity. Strelkov didn’t have the forces to sustain a front or surround a town, both of which he was inclined to do. His scarce manpower meant that he could only conduct small localized engagements and man a few checkpoints. Strelkov also claimed he could not properly organize and equip his militia due to a lack of resources.⁴⁷³ This could lead to speculation that Russia was not actively promoting the “separatist” uprising if it were not for the presence of Russian intelligence officers like Strelkov. What it does indicate is that as little infrastructure development as there was in Crimea before the invasion, there was even less in Donbas. Not only were there very few local “separatists” in the ranks of the DPR and LPR, but the provision of military equipment and other supplies to the rebels was insufficient to sustain their early momentum. Russia had forces massed on the border, but they had not planned for the logistical sustainment of the separatist force they were trying to raise.

⁴⁷¹ Gertz, *Ukrainian Rebel Commander Identified as Russian GRU Military Intelligence Colonel*

⁴⁷² “Igor Strelkov Interview to FSB general Gennadiy Kazantsev,” YouTube video, 6:00, from an interview aired on Anna News, posted by “Kazzura,” January 9, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sqBfMYpYGs.

⁴⁷³ “Igor Strelkov / Marat Musin Interview 29.10.2014,” YouTube video, 17:30, from an interview on Neuromir TV, October 29, 2014, posted by “Iarasdvatri123,” November 19, 2014,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ3VAn2Tfhc>.

In early July 2014, Strelkov was forced to abandon Sloviansk by the rapid advance of the Ukrainian ATO and he became increasingly concerned the entire rebel movement was at risk of being wiped out.⁴⁷⁴ Immediate Russian reinforcements were delayed in mid-July as Moscow was forced to weigh the impact of Russian involvement and a possible international response following the MH17 incident. On July 17, 2014 a Russian-made BUK anti-aircraft missile was fired from the area controlled by Strelkov's forces, at what the Russian commander believed to be a Ukrainian transport aircraft. Malaysian Air flight MH17 with 298 civilians aboard crashed in a field outside of Torez.⁴⁷⁵ Russian propagandists quickly churned out various conflicting theories regarding the shoot-down which alternatively suggested that the Ukrainians themselves had shot down the airliner with a fighter jet, then with surface to air missiles, and that the shoot-down was an attempt to assassinate Vladimir Putin, all while separatists blocked access to the crash site and removed physical evidence from the scene.⁴⁷⁶ Despite overwhelming evidence of Russian responsibility, these alternative theories provided Western leaders with excuses for inaction and reinforced Russia's ability to deny involvement in the ongoing war on the ground.

By late July, Strelkov and his advisors were stating publicly that Putin needed to increase Russian efforts in eastern Ukraine or the campaign would be lost and Putin's legitimacy in Russia would come into question.⁴⁷⁷ Strelkov claimed that out of 4.6 million people in the Donetsk region only about 1000 men had joined his separatist forces by mid-Summer. He acknowledged receiving irregular volunteers from Russia, but few had combat experience. Russia provided modern weapons such as tanks and anti-aircraft

⁴⁷⁴ Anna Nemtsova, "Putin's Number One Gunman in Ukraine Warns Him of Possible Defeat," *Daily Beast*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/25/putin-s-number-one-gunman-in-ukraine-warns-him-of-possible-defeat.html>.

⁴⁷⁵ Pamela Engel, "This is the Former Russian Military Officer Who might be Behind the Shooting of MH17," *Business Insider*, July 18, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-igor-strelkov-blamed-for-shooting-of-mh17-2014-7>.

⁴⁷⁶ "Russia, MH17 and the West: A Web of Lies." *The Economist*, July 26, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21608645-vladimir-putins-epic-deceits-have-grave-consequences-his-people-and-outside-world-web>.

⁴⁷⁷ Nemtsova, *Putin's Number One Gunman in Ukraine Warns Him of Possible Defeat*

systems, which Strelkov claimed he had to raise funds to purchase, but he had very few soldiers within the separatist ranks who knew how to operate the advanced equipment.⁴⁷⁸

By mid-August, the Ukrainian ATO had divided the LPR and DPR and was close to encircling both. Unfortunately for Ukraine, the breakthrough put Ukrainian forces within range of artillery from the Russian side of the border. Following widespread indirect fire engagement, during which entire Ukrainian battalions were completely wiped out, as many as 4000 Russian soldiers supported by the newest generation of T-72s crossed into Ukraine and directly engaged the Ukrainian army.⁴⁷⁹ On August 19, 2014, a convoy of Russian military vehicles crossed the Russian border and entered the Lugansk Oblast (now the self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic), followed by an ammunition resupply convoy disguised as "humanitarian aid" vehicles three days later.⁴⁸⁰ On 30 August 2014, pro-Russian soldiers speaking the Chechen language to each other were filmed in Ukraine manning Russian tanks and marked with the white arm-bands used as a simple form of recognition by other pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.⁴⁸¹ On 31 August 2014, Russian officials announced that six schools would be opened in Lugansk city the following day.⁴⁸² This action might have been an attempt to perform a civil affairs type of activity to promote a positive response from the residents of the city that the Russians had just occupied, but the schools were very near the active front and it is just as possible that the Russians' intent was to put children in a position where they might be harmed in the ongoing combat in order to create a useful storyline for anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

Despite the post-2008 military reforms, which ostensibly moved Russia away from the Soviet-era mobilization model, the Russians quickly found themselves stretched too thin to maintain a suitable effort in Ukraine. During the Ukrainian ATO, Putin may

⁴⁷⁸ Nemtsova, *Putin's Number One Gunman in Ukraine Warns Him of Possible Defeat*

⁴⁷⁹ Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine*, 5.

⁴⁸⁰ "Russians Increase their Military Forces in Lugansk." *Lugansk News Today*, August 31, 2014, <http://lugansk-news.com/russians-increase-their-military-forces-in-lugansk/>.

⁴⁸¹ "Russian Soldiers from Chechnya Fighting in Ukraine." *Lugansk News Today*, August 30, 2014, <http://lugansk-news.com/russian-soldiers-from-chechnya-fighting-in-ukraine/>.

⁴⁸² "Russians Plan to Open 6 Schools in Lugansk." *Lugansk News Today*, August 31, 2014, <http://lugansk-news.com/russians-plan-to-open-6-schools-in-lugansk/>.

have started to realize that the military aspect of the conflict was going to be a costly protracted effort that would likely draw increasing levels of Western support for Kiev if Russia's involvement was acknowledged as it had been in Georgia and Crimea. Without clear, achievable goals or any hope of a quick change to the political dynamic, Putin needed to keep the door open for a face-saving withdrawal while continuing to prop up the rebellion he had started. Whatever the reason for maintaining a modicum of deniability, Russia committed significant conventional forces on several occasions to keep the rebel front from collapsing.⁴⁸³ Providing these forces, as many as 10,000 in Donbas, over 40,000 postured on the Russian side of the border, and nearly 30,000 committed to the occupation of Crimea, has severely strained the capabilities of the Russian Army.⁴⁸⁴ Part of the effort to hide the overt commitment of Russian units and to mask the level to which forces from other Military Districts were drawn on to meet the need for troops in Ukraine was through the ad-hoc cobbling together of combat formations from multiple parent brigades and divisions.⁴⁸⁵

For the offensive in the summer of 2014, the Western and Southern Military Districts were able to commit enough fairly complete Battalion Tactical Groups for the operation, but by the winter they could barely piece together the same number of companies.⁴⁸⁶ Another indicator of personnel shortages were the reports of fraudulent conversion of Russian conscripts into contract soldiers for the purpose of filling the ranks.⁴⁸⁷ Problems with morale among the Russian troops and among their Donbas surrogates even necessitated the placement of the Russian Interior Ministry's Dzerzhinsky Division as "punitive action, anti-retreat troops behind the lines of rebels

⁴⁸³ Igor Sutyagin, *Russian Forces in Ukraine* (London UK: Royal United Services Institute, 2015), 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 4–6

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 6. Sutyagin attributes some of the lack of coherent organic force structure to the numbers of casualties that the Russians sustained. Russian army units are usually comprised of soldiers from the same general area where the force is based, so a high number of casualties in a particular unit, during a war that Putin has claimed Russia was not participating in, could have a significant impact politically. The cobbling together of units helped to prevent this in theory and helped support the narrative that all of the Russian soldiers were patriotic "volunteers" who were fighting while on leave or who resigned from the army before entering Ukraine on the rebels' behalf.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

and Russian regulars.”⁴⁸⁸ The Kremlin continued to maintain that the only Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine were volunteers on leave, despite evidence that composite units of conventional soldiers were being created and shipped along with their tanks and other heavy equipment to Ukraine from across the breadth of the Federation on Moscow’s orders.⁴⁸⁹

As Russia struggled to maintain the flow of weapons and soldiers into Ukraine, Moscow used the ploy of a diplomatic resolution to the conflict to cover the improvement of its military position. On September 5th, 2014, Russia signed the Minsk Protocol with representatives of Ukraine and the OSCE, agreeing to a ceasefire and a number of steps to reduce the military activity along the front.⁴⁹⁰ Russia used the unsteady ceasefire to rearm the rebel lines. Under Western pressure, Ukraine was forced to withdraw heavy weapons from the front, which enabled the rebels to launch an offensive to capture the hotly contested Donetsk airport. By January 2015, any pretense at abiding by the ceasefire was given up as the rebel forces launched attacks across the front, backed by Russian tanks troops and artillery which had been “pouring into the region.”⁴⁹¹ A second ceasefire, the February 12 Minsk II agreement, barely slowed the fighting as the rebels launched an all-out assault on a surrounded Ukrainian force at Debaltseve, forcing the defenders to abandon the strategic city and fight their way back to Ukrainian lines.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ Sutyagin, *Russian Forces in Ukraine*, 9.

⁴⁸⁹ Elena Kostychenko, “The Story of a Russian Soldier’s War in Ukraine: ‘We all Knew what we had to do and what could Happen,’” *Novaya Gazeta*, March 02, 2015, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/02/the-story-of-a-russian-soldiers-war-in-ukraine-we-all-knew-what-we-had-to-do-and-what-could-happen/>. This story provides one description of a Russian Buryat tanker who was transported with his crew and their tank from the border with Mongolia to Ukraine where he was severely wounded while fighting the Ukrainian army. Nemetsov’s *Putin. War* also provides a number of similar accounts. Some of these soldiers, including the Buryat, knew they were going to fight in Ukraine and were willing to do their duty, but they did so under orders from their Russian military commanders and were not acting of their own volition.

⁴⁹⁰ OSCE, *Chairperson-in-Office Welcomes Minsk Agreement, Assures President Poroshenko of OSCE Support* (Bern, Switzerland: OSCE, 2014).

⁴⁹¹ Rick Lyman and Andrew E. Kramer, “War is Exploding Anew in Ukraine; Rebels Vow More,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/24/world/europe/ukraine-violence.html?_r=0.

⁴⁹² Andrew E. Kramer and David M. Herszenhorn, “Ukrainian Soldiers’ Retreat from Eastern Town Raises Doubt for Truce,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/world/europe/ukraine-conflict-debaltseve.html>.

In mid-February of 2015 there were an estimated 14,400 Russian soldiers in eastern Ukraine supporting 29,300 “separatists” with the newest generation of Russian tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and indirect fire weapon systems, while another 55,800 Russian soldiers remained massed on the Russian side of Ukraine’s border.⁴⁹³ The war has given the Russian military the opportunity to field-test military systems that were not fully integrated into the capture of Crimea. One of the main Russian “firsts” in eastern Ukraine is the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as forward observers for Russian artillery and multiple launch rocket systems.⁴⁹⁴ Russia also heavily employed electronic warfare systems in Ukraine to both jam Ukrainian military communications and to disable UAVs employed by international monitors.⁴⁹⁵ Ukrainian communications were highly vulnerable to Russian direction finding equipment, which made the Ukrainian forces vulnerable to quick acquisition and bombardment with heavy artillery and rocket fire.⁴⁹⁶ This rather conventional application of fire at the decisive point is only unique in the degree to which Moscow continued to deny any responsibility for it despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Russia, while maintaining its non-involvement in the conflict, was still afforded a seat at the ceasefire discussions and continued to press for conditions beyond the scope of the immediate conflict.

E. CONCLUSION

Following two major Russian incursions into eastern Ukraine, first in August 2014 and then again in February 2015, the conflict settled along a fairly fixed front with numerous localized clashes but no major effort by either side to take new ground. Russia continued to maintain the narrative of “separatists” and “volunteers” despite overwhelming evidence of Russian regular forces and equipment present in Donbas. It is this combination of surrogates and regulars that has become the focal point for many hybrid warfare proponents and detractors. These combinations of force are interesting in

⁴⁹³ Johnson, *Update: Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine ‘is Working.’*

⁴⁹⁴ Keir Giles, “Ukraine Crisis: Russia Tests New Weapons,” *BBC News*, February 06, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31146595>

⁴⁹⁵ Johnson, *Update: Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine ‘is Working.’*

⁴⁹⁶ Giles, *Ukraine Crisis: Russia Tests New Weapons.*

the study of tactical maneuver, but they blur the distinctions of hybrid warfare with unconventional warfare, irregular warfare, combination warfare and other more established concepts. More importantly, they miss the strategic implications of hybrid warfare. As a matter of subordination, a hybrid warfare campaign may include unconventional warfare, irregular warfare or the use of terrorists, but only to the extent needed to support or finish the political warfare efforts toward the *sponsor's* strategic objectives. The discussion of resistance, insurgent or terrorist movements too often focuses on the narrative of local grievances and methods used in the immediate struggle. This is an exercise of limited value when the narrative, instruments of force, and the existence of the movement itself are the products of an external sponsor's creation. As the military forms of war became the dominant effort in Donbas, Russia's effort evolved into more traditional warfare waged with an interesting mix of proxies and regular soldiers under an uninterrupted campaign of denial.

The war in eastern Ukraine is demonstrative of the limits of hybrid warfare when the dynamic change of the political relationship is not masked, and when the objectives are unclear. When Russia decided to press its advantage following the Crimean annexation, and began organizing separatist elements across Ukraine's south and east, it did so under the complete awareness of the government in Kiev and of those in the international community who were not looking for alternative realities. Russia continued to employ political warfare against the Kiev and to discourage any third party involvement, but the line of contest was quickly reduced to the front in Donbas. Moscow certainly wanted to continue to exert financial and economic pressure on Ukraine, but "not losing" in Donbas became the most significant priority due to the effect this would have on Putin's domestic support. What Donbas revealed is that Russia was not conducting hybrid warfare from a position of overwhelming strength. The Russians need the kinetic aspect of a conflict to be over quickly in order to preserve troop strength and material inventory and to reduce the motivation for foreign intervention. A drawn out conventional engagement quickly taxes the Russians' ability to sustain combat forces and lacking a clear existential threat, Russian casualties represent a significant domestic political risk. Without a quick victory, Russia needed to find an acceptable point that

would preserve the idea of the rebellion and then used diplomacy to freeze the conflict for resolution at a more advantageous time.

More than a year-and-a-half after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's offensive in eastern Ukraine, the conflict largely disappeared from international headlines. With Russia's new "intervention" in Syria, the urgency for arming Ukraine largely abated, but without a definitive resolution the conflict has only entered a frozen status.⁴⁹⁷ This unresolved status is in keeping with Russia's method for retaining or regaining the initiative in its violations of its neighbors' sovereignty.⁴⁹⁸ The Russian hybrid war against Ukraine is far from over; it will just shift to political means for a time. The vitriol of Moscow's propaganda efforts to portray the Kiev government as a Nazi junta and Kiev's designation of all separatists as "terrorists" will make Ukrainian reassertion of governance over the rebel held region problematic. Reuniting with the entirety of Donbas is already a political issue in Kiev that will affect voter sentiment and drive politics, while taking priority away from other issues like properly addressing corruption and diversifying the national energy resources. These vulnerabilities will leave space for Russia to continue to exert coercive influence. Future regional and national elections will also undoubtedly be contested as so many of the Donbas region's residents are displaced. Ukraine has to take control over its border with Russia if it is to reassume a semblance of sovereignty, which Russia has demonstrably proven it is determined to undermine. Russia will continue to interfere with Kiev's ability to govern in the east, only now, Russia's means include a heavily armed population that has been forced to pick a side in an manufactured conflict, an unknown number of displaced Russo-Ukrainians in Russia with claims to property and political participation in Ukraine, and a border between the two entities that Russia will not relinquish to Kiev.

⁴⁹⁷ Tom Burrridge, "Ukraine Conflict: Guns Fall Silent but Crisis Remains," *BBC News*, October 23, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34606598>.

⁴⁹⁸ Mankoff, *Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine*. Mankoff claims Crimea was the exception in the list of frozen conflicts that includes: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and now Donbas. Through outright annexation, Russia stepped away from the regular playbook and forced a definitive solution (which Ukraine is not likely to ever accept). Mankoff believes that all of these efforts have pushed the target states into stronger relationships outside of the Russian sphere and have hurt Russia's relational power.

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VII. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY—THE UTILITY OF HYBRID WARFARE

We can now see that in war many roads lead to success, and that they do not all involve the opponent's outright defeat. They range from the destruction of the enemy's forces, the conquest of his territory, to a temporary occupation or invasion, to projects with an immediate political purpose, and finally to passively awaiting the enemy's attacks.

—Carl von Clausewitz⁴⁹⁹

The continued study of hybrid warfare, as a general theory for describing the behavior of states that pursue aggressive action below the threshold of conventional warfare, is important for promoting the continued stability of the modern state system. To date, explanations for this behavior have been limited to observations of the military forms of “internal” conflict and have been largely lacking examinations of the nature of the sponsoring state systems that enable the violation of other state's sovereignty in a time of peace. It is not sufficient to claim that the nature of hybrid warfare is limited to the use of terrorists, criminal networks, irregular forces, or non-attributable conventional military forms of war, but even in this limited scope conclusions can be made about the nature of an aggressor state. In order to condone the forceful violations of foreign sovereignty during a time of peace, the aggressor must have an offensive-realist perception of inter-state power relations. An aggressor must also have the ability to direct a significant portion of the elements of national power toward achieving a specific goal in order to achieve synergy. It can also be surmised that the aggressor must have strategic objectives that violate another state's sovereignty and a desire to at least partially achieve those objectives without a full-scale conventional invasion. The aggressor must then be able to sustain the strategic direction through any changes in his domestic government. After establishing that an aggressor state has these characteristics, hybrid warfare then involves the selective combination of a wide range of political and military instruments to

⁴⁹⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard, trans. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 94.

achieve the desired objectives while reducing the risk associated with a predominately military confrontation. Hybrid warfare involves various degrees of violence to augment and shape political warfare, but overt military force is usually employed to quickly consolidate the activity and present a *fait accompli*. Hybrid warfare is more successful when the dynamic change of the political relationship, marked by the introduction of conventional forces, is masked behind other world events and not declared by the aggressor country.

B. SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

After examining Russia's war with Georgia and the actions against Ukraine in Crimea and Donbas it is apparent that the focus on the military aspect of the operations has marginalized the importance of the long term deliberate political warfare that Russia waged against both countries. For these actions to be considered warfare, it must be concluded that Russia held strategic goals of forcing both countries to accept Russia's will. Russia's methodology for subverting Georgian and Ukrainian sovereignty included political coercion, economic warfare, information warfare, and select applications of violence all aimed at undermining governance, fracturing the territorial integrity of both states, and paving the way for the introduction of Russian armed forces to dynamically change the status quo in Russia's favor. Both Georgia and Ukraine were subject to different hybrid combinations of political and military warfare for years prior to the commonly accepted period of "war."

Putin's strategic themes of strengthening his domestic power, dominating the near abroad, and promoting Russian strength while frustrating the West, were all supported to some degree during the hybrid campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine. Following the color revolutions in the early 2000s, Russia risked losing both Georgia and Ukraine to blossoming democratic movements and deepening ties with the EU and NATO. Not only did these movements threaten Russia's sense of entitled interest in the affairs of the former Soviet states, but they represented the spread of Western ideology closer to Moscow, which the increasingly revanchist Russians interpret as a deliberate, Western plot to undermine Russia's governing system. To derail Georgian and Ukrainian efforts

to pull away from Russia's orbit, the Russians made multiple efforts to take control of the political systems in both countries through manufactured crisis, economic coercion, selective violence and political manipulation, before the ultimate use of overt force to consolidate Moscow's objectives.

In Georgia, Russia promoted the separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, providing both groups with heavy weapons and Russian officers to serve in leadership roles, while systematically removing any local leaders who were inclined to mend the relationship with Tbilisi. Moscow extended Russian citizenship to Abkhaz and Ossetian Georgians through the issuance of Russian passports, effectively creating a population of 'Russians' abroad to whom Moscow would be inclined to extend protection in the event they were to be threatened. Russia then used the ensuing acts of violence, both the interethnic and direct military confrontations, enabled by the equipment Russia provided and directed by Russian officers, to manufacture a 'threat' and justify the presence of large garrisons of Russian "peacekeepers" in Georgian territory. Moscow made its strategic objectives clear in 2004 when they offered to help support the Georgian President put down a pro-democracy uprising in exchange for Moscow's future ability to appoint the Georgian Ministers of Defense, Interior, and Security, which would have effectively relinquished Georgia's most powerful political offices to a foreign state. When the Georgian president refused Moscow's offer, Russia doubled its efforts to undermine Georgia's control over its territory.

In Ukraine, Russia already maintained a large military presence at the Black Sea Fleet's base in Sevastopol, Crimea. Years before the onset of wider military operations, Russia again offered passports to ethnic Russian citizens of Ukraine. Instead of initially trying to create an ethnic conflict however, Russia used the large population of Russians in Ukraine to attempt to take control of the Ukrainian government through political proxies. In 2004, Russian political operatives funneled over \$300 million dollars to a pro-Russian presidential candidate and Russian security services helped orchestrate massive electoral fraud to manipulate the outcome of the election. When the vote was overturned and the new Ukrainian administration began building closer ties to the EU, Putin used

economic warfare, primarily through Gazprom's monopoly of Ukrainian heating oil and natural gas, to pressure the population into turning on the government.

In both Georgia and Ukraine, Russia placed embargoes on goods produced in those countries in order to warn against or punish other movements in the Western direction. Dependency on Russian gas supplies was fostered through subsidies and then followed with demands for payments and threats of shutoffs during the height of winter. In Georgia, Russia regularly used violence, in the form of sabotage against critical infrastructure, terror attacks against security forces and civilians, and air support for separatist actions in order to stymie Tbilisi's efforts to reestablish control over the restive regions. Russia initially used lower levels of violence in Ukraine but the Russian dominated Berkut Special Police were regularly heavy handed when putting down pro-democracy protests, including the killing of dozens of protesters during the Euromaidan. In both instances, Russia used cyber-warfare to disrupt command and control systems and to help spread propaganda and disinformation to minimize local and international resistance. Despite all of these efforts, Georgia and Ukraine continued to resist Russian domination and Russia ultimately had to use military force to dynamically change the nature of the relationship, albeit at significantly lower levels than an all-out conventional invasion would have required.

During the five-day war in Georgia and during the occupation of Crimea, Russia masked the outset of the military action behind other significant events. Both actions began while world leaders were expressing goodwill at Olympic Games, and while other significant crises and political events indicated a minimal chance of a military reaction from the West. Both actions had limited military objectives that were able to be quickly reached, which minimized the level of ongoing violence and reduced the impetus for Western intervention. The war in Donbas lacked all of these things. It was started while international attention was directly on Russian action in Ukraine. It had unclear objectives, and became increasingly violent as "volunteers" and heavy equipment were introduced piecemeal. Russia attempted to dominate the information domain during all three conflicts to characterize each as an internal ethnic struggle, and Russia's actions as necessary to prevent genocide, while simultaneously denying the level of Russia's

involvement and providing disinformation that would further confuse a Western response. In Georgia and Donbas, Russia used diplomatic processes to freeze the conflicts without definitive resolution so that Russia was justified in keeping intervention or “peacekeeping” forces in the region and so that the open nature of the conflict could be used to derail future efforts for either state to join the EU or NATO. Crimea was annexed outright to eliminate the threat to the long-term basing of the Black Sea Fleet, and because the annexation provided a much needed boost to Putin’s domestic popularity.

Hybrid warfare is the combination of political and military forms of war to achieve strategic objectives while minimizing the cost and risk associated with a conventional military campaign. Hybrid warfare by definition does not imply the absence of military force or the use of violence, it requires it. The projection of offensive power is expensive and politically risky, more so when it comes at the end of a linear increase in hostilities and the victim has time to accurately interpret the aggressor’s intent and prepare to resist. By weakening the Georgian and Ukrainian states’ ability to control the entirety of their territories, undermining political, economic and defense development in both countries, and fomenting ethnic divisions, Russia was able to undermine the will and ability of each state to counter Russian aggression before Russia presented a “resolution” of its own design. When Russia continued to pursue the military aspect of hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine, Kiev was finally able to mount an effective response. The result was a bloody contest of attrition where Russia’s attempts to maintain some level of deniability constrained its ability to introduce a decisive amount of force.

C. A THEORY OF RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR

This research involved a heuristic analysis of the nature of Russian hybrid warfare and its relationship to strategy and interstate power. Because of the focus of study on cases involving a single aggressor, it can claim to be a theory that applies only to Russia, but was crafted with expectations of generalizability. Further testing is needed to make a more universal claim of applicability.

1. Preliminary Theoretical Framework Development

This study began with an examination of the different literature that framed the ongoing questions regarding the nature of hybrid warfare. To bridge the gap between common uses of the term and the theoretical foundations of strategy and state power, further study was conducted in these areas to produce a preliminary theoretical framework regarding the nature of hybrid warfare and the actor capable of practicing it effectively. As the term “hybrid warfare” is frequently associated with Russian actions, Russia was selected to limit independent variables across the cases. Russian political and military thinking in the contemporary and Soviet-eras was then examined for the conceptual roots and disposition necessary to employ political and military warfare against a neighbor during times of supposed peace in pursuit of strategic objectives.

This research concluded that Russia has a longstanding view of all foreign entities as a potential threat, and therefore desires relative superiority with its neighbors. Russia does not limit this perspective to military force alone. Vladimir Putin believes Western-liberalism is an alien concept that represents a threat to a strong Russian state that must not be allowed to take root on Russia’s borders. Russians do not share a Western perspective of the difference between peace and war. To Russians, war is not the continuation of politics by other means. In the anarchic space between states, war and politics are part of the same continuum. Putin’s emphasis on the “power vertical” as the strong centralized direction of state power, and his increasingly authoritarian control over the economic and informational domains provides him with the necessary level of control to synchronize their efforts toward strategic objectives. Through “managed democracy” Putin has a firm grasp on power and is able to maintain a stable trajectory for his strategic initiatives.

It was also determined that Russian strategic thought was built on the foundations Soviet-era political-military philosophy. Russians have long examined strategies for attrition of an adversary’s defenses through combinations of political and military means, the interchangeability of the means of war based on effects in a deep battle, and non-linear warfare conducted throughout an adversary’s geopolitical space. Russian strategic objectives are state secrets, but Russia’s actions indicate three principle themes: 1)

solidify and maintain the Putin's hold on power, 2) ensure Russian dominion over the near-abroad, and 3) restore Russia's status as a global power.

2. Framework Applied to Three Cases

This framework was then partnered with a model of Chinese Unrestricted Warfare as presented by Callard and Faber and applied to three cases of Russian aggression—the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the 2014 Occupation of Crimea, and the 2014–2015 war in east Ukraine—in the post-Soviet space to test the theory. The two operations against Ukraine were closely related in time and by the shared target government, but appeared to have very different outcomes and were therefore examined as separate cases. Through the examination of a wide range of state means as instruments of warfare it was possible to confirm the nature of the Russian regime and conclude that Russia pursues strategic objectives through hybrid political and military means during times of supposed peace. All of the cases included a phase of conventional military primacy, but these efforts were most effective when they were limited to quickly consolidating clear objectives.

3. The New Russian Way of War

The findings from these case studies resulted in a mezzo-level theory of Russian hybrid warfare which will set the stage for general theory development. Russia has characteristics that facilitate the practice of hybrid warfare.

1. Offensive-realist
2. Willing to employ violence and violate sovereignty during “peace”
3. Centralized/ authoritarian government
4. Other-than-military means of national power

Russia also recognizes its own military shortcomings. Putin desires to be perceived as a military power and he is taking steps to rebuild some of Russia's diminished military capability. Even in their present state, Russia could militarily force the governments of Ukraine or Georgia to capitulate outright, but such efforts would incur a significant cost to existing military capability. Those efforts would also be drawn-out and bloody, which would increase the possibility of international intervention and a

humiliating punishment to Putin's conventional power. Russia uses hybrid warfare to pursue its strategic objectives at reduced levels of risk. This implies two things:

1. Strategic ends that were the traditional objectives of military warfare
2. The practice of deception to mask the offensive nature of political actions

Russia has long theorized and practiced the combination of political and military warfare. Russia employs any number of non-military and above military forms of political warfare to undermine a target states sovereign ability to administer its territory and govern its population. During this process, Russia employs limited levels of violence toward the same ends while remaining below the threshold of state-on-state warfare. These activities include terrorism, assassination, sabotage, arming of proxy forces, and the use of deniable state military forces. Russia uses diplomacy to freeze conflicts and delay overt warfare to a time of Moscow's choosing. When Putin determines the timing is right, Russia uses deception to mask the dynamic change in the level of force, and quickly consolidates the limited objectives before freezing the conflict and presenting a new status quo. It is a characteristic of Russian hybrid warfare that no conflict examined has yielded a complete discernable "victory." Each case has the potential to flare up again in the future and Russia may very well use this to make further gains against the target states or as leverage against the international community.

D. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY REGARDING RUSSIA

One of the worst reactions to hybrid warfare may be to perpetuate its effectiveness by being "diplomatic" in addressing it. Fear of provoking an aggressor who is already conducting offensive actions, regardless of the domain, and not calling out that aggression does not aid the immediate victim or help deter similar action elsewhere. Allowing the aggressor to define the terms used to describe the conflict and thus maintain control of the narrative will also frustrate any effort to counter the aggressor's actions. There was no "separatist" movement in east Ukraine and the fighting there was not a civil conflict or an internal dispute. The war in eastern Ukraine was entirely a product of the Kremlin's design, as were the armaments and Russian troops who made up the bulk of the pro-Russian forces. This was an invasion of Ukraine by Russia as was the Crimean

operation by Vladimir Putin's own admission after months of public claims to the contrary. The West must "counter, not abet, Russia's hybrid war by speaking clearly, consistently, and publicly about Russia's war against Ukraine."⁵⁰⁰

The weaponization of information, culture and money is a vital part of the Kremlin's hybrid, or non-linear, war, which combines the above elements with covert and small-scale military operations. The conflict in Ukraine saw non-linear war in action. Other rising authoritarian states will look to copy Moscow's model of hybrid war—and the West has no institutional or analytical tools to deal with it.⁵⁰¹

"Hybrid warfare" has become a widely used and widely interpreted term for describing Russia's actions in Ukraine. Some analysts have used the narrow focus of irregular combinations of forces and tactics to suggest tactical counter-measures based on the scenarios that played out in Ukraine. Others have used the lack of solid meaning of "hybridity" to attempt to downplay the impact of the second half of the term; that the actions are in fact an act of war.⁵⁰² Only by widening the aperture to consider the combined application of political and military means toward a strategic end is it possible to understand the nature of a hybrid conflict at the time of its inception; well in advance of the outbreak of open hostilities. Hybrid warfare is increasingly enabled by the interdependencies of globalization and the instruments of liberal societies. The nature of these interactions must be kept as open and free as possible, but they cannot be allowed to become platforms that jeopardize the existence of the very societies they are supposed to serve.

⁵⁰⁰ Maksymilian Cziperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2015): 3.

⁵⁰¹ Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money," *The Interpreter* (2014): 6.

⁵⁰² Nadia Schadlow, "The Problem with Hybrid Warfare," *War on the Rocks* (April 2, 2015). Schadlow described the frustration of a number of NATO members when the term Hybrid Warfare is used to explain Russia's actions. These countries fear that the effort spent trying to frame these actions as anything less than war are an effort by members of the alliance to avoid having to commit to a response demanded by NATO's Article V. Meanwhile a number of these countries already believe they are being targeted and worry that their states could be crippled before it is even fully aware that a conflict has begun. Schadlow calls a hybrid threat the "perfect conundrum: the injection of so much uncertainty that NATO collapses under its own principle of allied consensus."

Hybrid warfare is a whole-of-government approach to waging a subversive, limited war and it requires a whole-of-government effort to assess the nature of the aggressor, identify signs of a strategic design in motion, and to take steps to counter the potential impact of the instruments of political warfare while bolstering the forces of deterrence. Potential victims of hybrid warfare must identify and mitigate vulnerabilities to an aggressor's forms of political warfare to include diversifying economic sectors that are solely reliant on one actor. Laws must be passed and enforced that prohibit certain relationships with a threatening state to include political party affiliation, board membership or "consulting" relationships with aggressor state's businesses, and media platforms used to promote the aggressor's propaganda. Treating foreign government platforms like *RT* as equal members of the free press is absurd; allowing them to purchase access directly into the living rooms of millions of Western households is suicidal. Target states must invest in thorough counterintelligence activities to identify, isolate, and remove aggressor agents from their political, military, and intelligence organs. International organizations must also introduce severe punitive measures aimed at modifying behavior and then at isolating and undermining the regimes of aggressor states.

Economic sanctions against Russia have not yet been sufficient to modify Moscow's behavior and should probably be seen as ineffective as a deterrent against future hybrid aggression.⁵⁰³ There is a role for conventional force in countering hybrid warfare, but it will not be found in traditional defensive alliances like NATO. Potential targets of hybrid warfare must adopt a realist-like understanding that they alone can ensure a timely response to military incursions. Projecting military weakness will only add to an aggressor's expectations of success. Conventional forces must actively war game and plan for the most dangerous courses of action and continuously conduct assessments of vulnerabilities in both the political and military spheres. Georgian military

⁵⁰³ John R. Haines, "Putin's 'New Warfare,'" *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (May, 2014). Haines observes that "economic sanctions can be credited with success if they meet three criteria: (1) the target state concedes to a significant part of the coercer's demands; (2) economic sanctions were applied before the target state altered its behavior; and (3) no more-credible explanations exist for the target state's change of behavior. It seems unlikely today that these criteria will be satisfied in any meaningful sense. Moreover, showing that economic sanctions have *some* effect does not imply economic sanctions alone can achieve comparable ends to military force alone, or to the employment of the two together."

planners, for example, should have long realized the importance that the Roki tunnel would play to any large scale Russian incursion into South Ossetia. That choke point should have had redundant plans for its closure in the event of a conflict. The West's preferred response to the overt forms of Russian hybrid warfare appears to be rooted in economic sanctions, which "may make threats of force more credible, but they do not substitute for them."⁵⁰⁴ George Kennan's observations of the Soviet Union and his early formulation of a policy of containment still apply to contemporary Russia.

Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw-and usually does when strong resistance is encountered at any point. Thus, if the adversary has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so. If situations are properly handled there need be no prestige-engaging showdowns.⁵⁰⁵

Russia and other potential aggressors must be watched for indicators of an offensive strategy not just against near/ regional targets but also against far/ international bodies. Russia's actions in Syria in late 2015 for example, should not be assessed merely for their impact in the Middle East. It is no coincidence that Russia's entry into the war came at a time when refugees from that conflict were flooding into Europe and straining the inter-state relationships of members of Russia's principle adversaries; the EU and NATO. In lieu of an immediate military confrontation in Europe, Russia has exacerbated the conflict in Syria and is helping to drive more refugee's into Europe as indirect weapons aimed at undermining the cohesion of its geopolitical rivals. Other actors have subsequently realized the potential of using immigrants as weapons against the West and have proclaimed their intention to promote further migration if their demands are not met.⁵⁰⁶ Putin and his inner circle are increasingly worried about how long they can distract the Russian public while inflation is rising, the ruble is falling, and from the fact

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ George F. Kennan, *The Long Telegram (from U.S. Charge D' Affairs in the Soviet Union to the U.S. Secretary of State)* (Washington, DC: 1946). part 5(1).

⁵⁰⁶ Nick Gutteridge, "Libya's Rulers 'Weaponise' Migrants Threatening to Flood Europe with Millions of Muslims," *Express UK*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/616657/European-migrant-crisis-refugees-Libya-government-war>.

that they have no strategy for actual growth.⁵⁰⁷ To preserve his inflated popularity and maintain power, Putin may strike out in an unexpected direction. The potential for the wave of Muslim immigrants to reignite sectarian conflict in places like the former Yugoslavia, where Russia maintains strong ties to the Serbian state, should not be underestimated.

Putin's actions in Ukraine and subsequent saber rattling in Scandinavia, the Baltic and elsewhere have forced a number of states and alliances to examine the nature of their defenses. "Nobody knows where Putin will stop. But there is fear in Poland and the Baltic states that sooner or later he will try and conquer the rest of what he claims of what he calls 'Novorossiia,' or New Russia: a huge territory stretching from Donetsk all the way to the borders of Moldova."⁵⁰⁸ Even Russia's allies like Belarus are considering what Moscow might be planning regarding their sovereignty.⁵⁰⁹ For the states that look only at the appearance of "little green men," proxy forces, terrorists, and other military forms of war, the risk is high that they will not effectively resist Russia's efforts in the non-military domains. Ukrainian political scientist, Georgi Pocheptsov, described Russia's hybrid warfare theory as being based on concealment of the campaign's military nature and participation [manipulation] in the structures of the target State.⁵¹⁰ Pocheptsov has correctly identified the two necessary components of hybrid warfare, the political and the military, and the importance of information warfare to both.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁷ Andrei Kolesnikov and Andrew S. Weiss, "Why do Vladimir Putin and His Kremlin Cronies Look so Nervous?" *Reuters*, September 8, 2015, <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/09/08/why-do-vladimir-putin-and-his-kremlin-cronies-look-so-nervous/>.

⁵⁰⁸ Judah, *Putin's Coup: How the Russian Leader used the Ukraine Crisis to Consolidate His Dictatorship*.

⁵⁰⁹ Andrei Aleksandrovich, "Каковы Перспективы Беларуси В Гибридной Войне? [what are the Prospects for Belarus in a Hybrid War?]," *EJ.BY*, October 22, 2015, <http://ej.by/news/politics/2015/10/22/kakovy-perspektivy-belarusi-v-gibridnoy-voyne.html>. Belorussian political scientist, Victor Denisenko claims that Russia has a long history of hybrid warfare beginning with the 1939 Soviet-Finnish, progressing through the "bloodless" annexation of the Baltic States, the 2008 Georgian war and now with the operations in Crimea and Donbas. Denisenko attributes the best description of the Russian perspective of hybrid warfare to Ukrainian political scientist, Georgi Pocheptsov. Denisenko theorizes that Russia could have two different hybrid warfare plans for Belorussia, one that includes President Lukashenko and one that replaces him.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

Some NATO members have already begun to take steps toward countering hybrid warfare from Russia. Diversification and reducing dependence on Russian sources of energy (and anything else) removes significant levers of influence.⁵¹² Lithuania has built a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal to import gas from non-Russian sources; the result is independence from Gazprom and a 24 percent reduction in LNG cost.⁵¹³ The defense aspect to steps like Lithuania's should be the understanding of the strategic importance of such a site and the necessity to take steps to ensure it is hardened against, sabotage, cyber and other forms of attack. Countering hybrid warfare must not rely solely on defensive measures. Russia employs hybrid warfare as a risk mitigation practice that preserves its military element of power and in doing so maintains the initiative for the introduction of violence. A comprehensive approach to countering hybrid warfare must consider the application of violence to adjust the aggressor's cost/ benefit calculation. Major defensive alliances like NATO are ill structured for this task, but individual states and smaller coalitions need to consider the possibilities for deniable hybrid responses that allow an off-ramp for escalation while simultaneously sending clear signals and inflicting real costs for violations of sovereignty.

Hybrid warfare is likely already being practiced against near/regional and far/Western targets by Russia and other offensive-realist, authoritarian states that desire to reach strategic ends without directly confronting the West militarily. It must be the objective of Western policy to identify these actors and to minimize the potential effects of their political means of warfare while military planners examine the defense vulnerabilities that begin in the political sphere. This means that first and foremost, the

⁵¹² "NATO to Counter 'Hybrid Warfare' from Russia." *BBC News*, May 14, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32741688>. NATO Chief Jens Stoltenberg identifies 'hybrid warfare' as a combination of convention threats, subversion, and cyber warfare. This is indicative of the evolving understanding of hybrid warfare in Europe, and while it could be interpreted as combining military (conventional) and political (subversion) forms of war, it can only be assumed that the cyber domain gets unique consideration because of its emerging potential for disruption and its ties across so many other domains. Cyber is an important aspect of hybrid warfare, but it needs to be considered for the effects in the financial, economic, military, informational and political domains, and not solely as a unique cyber-sphere.

⁵¹³ Kenneth Rapoza, "How Lithuania is Kicking Russia to the Curb," *Forbes.Com*, October 18, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2015/10/18/how-lithuania-is-kicking-russia-to-the-curb/>.

sponsors of hybrid warfare have to be called out without equivocation. If hybrid warfare is to be deterred, its practice must invite a direct threat to the regime that sponsored it.

E. TOWARD A GENERAL THEORY OF HYBRID WARFARE

The results of this research indicate that hybrid warfare is a way of synchronizing the range of possible *means* toward achieving a desired *end*, while minimizing the risks associated with direct military confrontation. Hybrid warfare is the combination of political (above military and non-military) forms of war with select levels of violent, military warfare. It is conducted by actors with a wide range of means at their disposal and the ability to marshal and synchronize these means to achieve military like objectives during peace. The sudden introduction of overt military forces is masked through deception and denial to confuse a coherent response. Overt military action is limited in scale and duration to solidify the aggressor's control over an objective, and levels of violence are non-linear and do not necessarily end with the signing of a ceasefire. Further efforts toward a general theory should consider independent variables of the nature of the aggressor state; offensive-realist power position, lack of delineation between states of peace and war, centralized authoritarian government, long-term strategic direction; intermediate variables of a strategic design to violate another state's sovereignty and an effort to mask or deny the transition to overt warfare; and the dependent variables of all of the possible forms of non-military, above military and military warfare. Further study of possible cases of hybrid warfare should evaluate data collected independent of model formulation.

To refine a general theory of hybrid warfare, further study is needed of other offensive-realist actors for indications of hybrid attacks against sovereignty. Potential supporting cases could include Iran in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and Syria; Russia in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Syria; and China in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Japan, and Russia. Statistical analysis of the political and military means employed and the effects achieved may reveal a pattern of behavior that can be used for predicting future action. As new forms of political and military warfare are conceptualized, they should be added to Callard and Faber's model of *Unrestricted Warfare*. If Russia's behavior

demonstrates anything, it is that Russia is willing to pursue multiple hybrid campaigns against both near and far targets simultaneously. Game theoretic analysis of possible Russian strategies may indicate Russia's calculations regarding the conditions for hybrid warfare outside of the purely post-Soviet space. This approach may help illuminate Russia's strategic objectives, as well as identify specific vulnerabilities in the international system.

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